



TEAMSTERS HISTORY



Graphic Art by David Jacobsen

174 RETIREE JOE WAKAZURU REMINISCES

By **HANK THOMPSON**
General Teamsters Retirees
Club President

Joe Wakazuru believes he was the first Asian member in the Teamsters Union in Seattle, in Local 174. This coming January 3rd, Joe will be 91-years old. My guess is that there are not many folks still around who could refute his claim if they wanted to.

Joe is a sturdy, compact Japanese-American who resides in a tidy bungalow on the south side of Beacon Hill. Having had a florist shop, and being an avid gardener, his yard is replete with giant river boulders, and is something to behold.

He was born in Delta, Colorado, where his parents were onion farmers. The year was 1919, and 6 years later the family moved back to Japan. Here off and on in Delta and Seattle, Joe lived and went to USA schools for a total of 12 years. In Japan in his early years, he told me, he did not attend school during the harvest seasons. Joe explained in his slightly broken accent that he was a quick language learner, saying that when he left for Japan from Colorado in his youth, he already spoke "perfect English."

Upon returning to the States again with his family, this time to Seattle, he completed his academic career at Broadway High School. There he met his wife, **Barbara**, in 1941, and they were married in 1942. Shortly thereafter, nearly all the Japanese and Japanese Americans in the U.S. were moved to internment camps by our Federal Government.

Joe and Barbara were sent to the famous and infamous camp in Tule Lake, California. Tule Lake was the largest of the ten War Relocation Authority camps used to carry out the Federal Government's system of exclusion and detention of persons of Japanese descent, mandated by Executive Order. The Order eliminated Constitutional protections. It was issued February 19, 1942 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Two-thirds of the 120,000 persons of Japanese descent incarcerated in the camps were American citizens. Tule Lake Camp opened May 26, 1942, detaining persons of Japanese descent removed from Western Washington, Oregon and Northern California. It had a peak population of 18,700. It closed on March 28, 1946.

While in the Tule Lake camp as an intern, one beneficial thing at least happened to Joe — he got into truck driving unexpectedly. He



Local 174 member Greg Duff and Joe Wakazuru. Dave Jacobsen photo.

made deliveries in a DC25 truck for the camp's "authorities."

In 1945 at the end of WWII, the internees were given \$50 and a train ticket to wherever they wanted to go. Joe confided that at that time he was resentful of the way they had been treated and noted that during the Reagan Administration they (the Japanese internees) received \$200 and an apology.

Back in Seattle in 1945, Joe said, "Times were tough, but Mr. Radinski gave me a chance." He got hired as a general assistant for 90 cents an hour, and in 1946 he got a job driving a small semi and joined the Teamsters Union making \$1.10 an hour. He moved up to driving a larger rig and delivered scrap iron, running between Seattle, Tacoma and Portland.

Joe shared many memories of his working life and one recollection prompted him to chuckle upon reflection.

He was stopped by the State Patrol and taken to the weigh station. The truck was impounded, A patrolman took him to the Grayhound depot where he was sent home. The next day his boss was fined \$700!

On another occasion he was involved in a collision and, he recalled, "I almost killed two ladies." That incident and recurring kidney problems prompted him to leave truckdriving and his Local 174 connection and look for less physically demanding and dangerous work.

So, in 1958, Joe became a Local 174 retiree and opened Southend Florist in White Center. The shop is still operating today under other owners, and is now run primarily by **Gayle Duff**, wife of Local 174 member **Greg Duff**. Joe worked at Southend Florist 32 years until 1990 before turning over the daily grind to others. Since that time, he said, he has mostly "gardened, golfed, traveled and enjoyed life." But he's kept an eye on how things are going at the shop. Joe and Barbara have three children and 7 grandchildren.

We asked Joe about his secret of living to a ripe old age as he has. He said he quit smoking at age 50, and was past 40 before he touched alcohol — but while saying that he was laughing and wondered aloud why he had waited so long. Now he does enjoy a gin and tonic and sports — all of them! Barbara said he has never complained of headaches or toothaches, and by the looks of Joe, he'll still be doing interviews many years from now.

DISASTER RESPONSE TRAINING IS DISCUSSED AT DECEMBER 10 GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

By **DAVE JACOBSEN**

Local 174 member **Kandy Paulson** (Hos Bros.) and **Melina Harris** (Carpenters Union) both are members of the Sisters in the Building Trades. Melina, who is the President of the SITBT, gave a power point presentation at the Local 174 General Membership Meeting on December 10 on "Disaster Response Training."

She spoke about the upcoming Training Events tentatively scheduled for the end of February of 2010, coordinated by the SITBT and



Left-to-right at the annual Oregon Tradeswomen Leadership Institute recently, four members of the Sisters in the Building Trades from its Washington State Chapter: Kandy Paulson, Teamster; Carolina Taylor, Ironworker; Melina Harris, Carpenter; and Debra Lemmon, Operator.

others. It will be at the South Seattle Community College Duwamish Apprenticeship Campus, 6737 Corson Avenue South, Building B, Seattle WA 98108.

This Training is to Prepare participants for Disaster Cleanup work. OSHA 10 is a prerequisite for this Training.

Why Take The Training?

1. The Green River Valley will likely flood, a little or a lot, this year.
2. We live between two active volcanoes and in an earthquake subduction zone.
3. A lot of people are out of work — they, especially, have the time.
4. The Training will make you better qualified for Disaster Site Cleanup work or to Volunteer to help in your community.
5. It will look good on your resume when you are putting in for work.
6. It will better enable you to care for your co-workers, family, home and community in case of a Disaster.

Kandy is taking charge on recruiting fellow Teamster members to get signed up for the Training Program. Many other crafts are already trained and ready to assist when called up for a disaster. They need commercial drivers to move the equipment.

Regardless of if you drive heavy highway, grocery, freight, small package or shipyard, they'll need everyone's talent in a major disaster. You can contact Local 174's Office for more information and to get a form to fill out. No question Building Trades Union members play a key role in any disaster cleanup operation. But to prevent injury and avoid long-term health problems, they also need the proper Training.

The courses offered at the South Seattle Community College Duwamish Campus provide that Training to the qualified — who could be vital to Washington State's disaster response.