

Not For Release Until: Thursday, January 2, 2025, 9 a.m. PST

Media Contact: Calvin Naito, marketing and PR consultant:
Calvin@CalvinNaito.com; 323-855-3980 (cell)

**DESCENDANTS OF AN INTERNED FAMILY HOLD A TEACHABLE
MOMENT ON 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF JAPANESE AMERICANS
RELEASE FROM WORLD WAR II INTERNMENT CAMPS**

The Mukai family, with longtime East LA roots, tell their inspiring story and underscore the need for public education about the episode and the need to preserve our nation's commitment to "equal justice under law"

LOS ANGELES, Calif. -- January 2, 2025 -- Residents of East Los Angeles marked the 80th anniversary of the day in 1945 when the Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II were allowed to return to their former hometowns on the West Coast. The Mukai family, who have roots in East LA since the 1920s, and who were among the thousands of individuals who were incarcerated for years and then released on this day in history, held a teachable moment for the community and beyond. Descendent Ron Mukai, who built the area's largest commercial center in decades and created East LA Jiu Jitsu, a nonprofit center, told his family's inspiring overcoming adversity story.

After Japan attacked the United States in December of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that led to the government rounding up and incarcerating 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens. Although the government cited national security risk as their rationale, none of the individuals incarcerated had committed any crimes related to the executive order. The Japanese Americans were incarcerated for most of the duration of World War II, even though the government never filed criminal charges against any of the individuals who were imprisoned. Many individuals lost their homes, businesses, and farms, with losses totaling in the hundreds of millions of dollars. When released from the internment camps, administrators provided each Japanese American \$25 and a one-way train ticket to their former hometown.

Mr. Mukai said, "Nearly all the people who attend the jiu jitsu center are completely unaware that the government incarcerated the Japanese Americans. This lack of knowledge is likely mirrored in the greater SoCal area and across the nation. Given the ignorance of this episode, which has been called the worst wholesale violation of civil rights in U.S. history, I see a need for greater public education on this issue locally and nationally."

Mr. Mukai, a black belt in jiu jitsu, spoke at the jiu jitsu center about the significance of the 80th anniversary to a group of students, mostly young Latinos who live in East LA, and led them in various exercises. The center is located at 3660 1st Street in East LA.

Mr. Mukai talked about his family's early roots in East LA, their incarceration, their return to East LA and years-long recovery, the development of the large commercial center at Mednik Avenue and 3rd Street, and the creation of the jiu jitsu center, which provides training classes to young people regardless of their ability to pay. Mr. Mukai, who speaks Spanish and whose wife is Latino, showed family photos that chronicle his family's over 100-year presence in East LA. Mr. Mukai's father, grandparents, and two uncles were incarcerated at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Mr. Mukai's parents first met when they were students at East LA's Garfield High School, where his mother was prom queen.

"In the 1920s, my grandfather owned a general store at the Mednik Avenue and 3rd Street property," Mr. Mukai said. "Through the years, my family also owned Belvedere Bottle Supply, an auto repair shop, a hot dog stand, and Tomic Insecticide, which is one the current tenants at the commercial center." The commercial center, which opened in 2003, was the first completed project of the East LA Civic Center area's multi-million-dollar expansion and redevelopment effort that included improvements to county offices, Belvedere Park, and the local library.

As part of the new year celebrations, attendees also socialized and were served mochi and pan dulce, desserts that are commonly eaten by Japanese and Latinos, respectively, as part of their new year ethnic traditions.

Derrick Corona, a local high school student, said, "Mr. Mukai's story was very interesting. I didn't know the details of what happened to the Japanese Americans. What happened to them was terrible, completely unfair. We need to treat all types of people the same and not be driven by prejudices and misunderstandings. I can see now why Mr. Mukai created this jiu jitsu center, and why he seems so fair and committed to helping others."

The nation's sentiment towards the incarceration, has shifted through time. In August 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which apologized to and provided redress to the Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II. The Republican president said at the time, "Yet no payment can make up for those lost years. So what is most important in this bill has less to do with property than with honor. For here we admit a wrong. Here we affirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law."

Mr. Mukai said he agrees with President Reagan's words but says the fight to preserve the civil liberties protections laid out in the U.S. Constitution will always continue. He noted that

current policy debates related to xenophobia, immigration, excluding and detaining groups of people, and civil liberties have parallels to issues what existed in the 1940s.

Mr. Mukai said, "On this 80th anniversary, we need to remember the lessons of history and continue to educate each generation. This story needs to be included in the curriculum of high school and university history courses so students will become more sensitized to this part of American history. Greater inclusion of the Japanese American incarceration episode in our schools can help ensure that such an injustice never happens again to any minority and marginalized group."

###