

JAMO exhibit explores the legacy of influential civic leader Bill Naito

By Kathleen Liermann
The Asian Reporter

Members of the community are invited to learn more about Bill Naito, one of Portland's greatest champions, at a new exhibit at the Japanese American Museum of Oregon in northwest Portland. "Because of Bill: William Sumio Naito's Legacy in Portland" peeks into the life of the visionary leader.

The larger-than-life display, which literally features a wall-size portrait of Bill and his infectious smile, is on view through September 1. Naito was the catalyst behind many major events in Portland, and his name became synonymous with civic leadership, whether growing Portland's urban tree canopy, revitalizing its downtown, or preserving historic buildings.

Jaime Lim, publisher of *The Asian Reporter*, was aware of Naito's many contributions in the 1970s and '80s. "Bill was a very good businessman and a true visionary," said Lim. "I remember visiting him at his office. He had a positive influence on Portland and its people."

Bill Naito was born in 1925 to father Hide (pronounced hee-day) and mother Fukiye (pronounced foo-kee-yeh). Hide (1893-1989) immigrated to the U.S. in 1912 and later settled in Portland. In 1920, Hide started the Naito family business, a Japanese curio shop downtown, just outside Nihonmachi (Japantown). Hide and Fukiye (1899-1969) were married that same year.



Their first son, Samuel Teruhide, was born in 1921, and their third son, Albert Teruo, was born in 1928. "The family maintained a traditional household, conversing only in Japanese [at home], but still encouraged their sons to become American," according to one of the exhibit's panels. "... Despite the rise of anti-Asian sentiment across the United States, the Naito family felt welcome in their neighborhood. Growing up in southeast Portland cemented in Bill a deep love of his city."

On December 7, 1941, after the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawai'i, life changed overnight. And when U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, the family was forced to leave.

Bill's father said incarceration was not an option for his family and they instead

moved inland.

Fukiye had family who lived in Salt Lake City, so the Naitos "packed up their car, checked in with federal authorities at the Portland Assembly Center, and drove to Utah," reads another panel. "Bill [then a sophomore in high school] was too humiliated and ashamed of being labelled 'un-American' to say goodbye to his friends. Later in life he would work to prove himself to the broader American society that had rejected him during the war."

After his high school graduation in 1944, Bill enlisted in the army and served with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), a segregated unit comprised of mostly Japanese Americans.

After the war, Bill returned to Portland to attend Reed College on the G.I. Bill. In 1949, he enrolled at the University of

INFLUENTIAL PORTLANDER. William Sumio Naito (1925-1996), the Portland-born son of Japanese immigrants who became one of Portland's most significant business and civic leaders, was a remarkable and visionary individual. "Because of Bill: William Sumio Naito's Legacy in Portland," a new exhibit that opened over the weekend at the Japanese American Museum of Oregon in northwest Portland, is on view through September 1. Pictured is Bill Naito at his family's business office, the Norcrest China Company. (Photo courtesy of Erica Naito-Campbell)

Chicago, where he earned his master's degree. While in Chicago, a good friend introduced him to his younger sister, Millicent, also known as "Micki." After a year of dating, they married in 1951. Later, in 1953, Bill and Micki returned to Portland to join the family business and raise a family.

In 1956, Hide, Sam, and Bill moved their business into the Fleischner-Mayer Building and started the Norcrest China Company. Four years later, they bought the building, obtaining the first property in their eventual real estate empire. It was then that Bill's interest in downtown — particularly in transforming it into a livable city center with green spaces and places to live, work, shop, and play — began. Among the many projects he had a hand in were the Japanese American Historical Plaza, the downtown transit mall, the preservation of Old Town, and the transformation of the Harbor Drive freeway into Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park.

In addition to Bill and his family's history, the exhibit also highlights Bill's revitalization and quality-of-life projects

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