How Hope Springs from Disaster

Flash of Cheer: As documented in forthcoming film, Olympian Kristi Yamaguchi (right) joined other leaders in the ‘Project Aloha’ tour to lift spirits among families in Japan’s Tohoku region.

–From ‘Stories from Tohoku: With Heart and Hope’
Courtesy of Dianne Fukami

The Bay Area’s Response to Japan’s 3-11 Catastrophe

Dilena Takeyama Center Convenes Philanthropic Leaders at San Francisco State

By Ken Yamada

On a cold and windy afternoon in March of 2011 began a series of catastrophic events plunging Japan into its greatest crisis since World War II. A devastating earthquake rocked the country’s Northern Honshu region, wreaking havoc in towns and villages. The violent convulsions unleashed huge tsunami waves that rolled ashore just 30 minutes later, an unstoppable force sweeping away thousands of people and flattening or destroying what the earthquake did not. The impact knocked out the Fukushima nuclear power plant, cracking its seemingly invincible structures, which exploded and spewed poisonous radiation, igniting widespread fears of an invisible danger. The combination earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster spawned an unimaginable triple calamity, bringing the country to its knees.

News of the disaster quickly spread throughout Japan and beyond. The world witnessed an unfolding tragedy through surreal video of devastation and carnage posted on YouTube and elsewhere on the Internet. Never before had such images been recorded and disseminated so widely and quickly, thanks to the ubiquity of computers, the World Wide Web and wireless technology.

The news reports spurred people everywhere to offer help, a feeling especially strong in the San Francisco Bay Area, a region with historically strong ties to Japan. Its community groups, non-
When disaster struck Japan’s northeast coast on March 11, 2011, San Francisco Bay Area residents, businesses, foundations and nonprofit organizations reacted almost immediately. By all measures, the response was generous and heartfelt, from neighborhood bake sales to large donations from corporations and foundations.

How and why did this happen? To explore this question, the Dilena Takeyama Center for the Study of Japan and Japanese Culture at San Francisco State University invited prominent leaders in philanthropy, business, community affairs, the media and the academy to share stories, insights and predictions. For most of the participants, our event on March 1, 2012 offered the first chance to sit together, talk about their experiences and exchange lessons learned.

The roundtable discussion was moderated by Executive Director Jon Funabiki. A professor of journalism, he has covered Japan as a journalist and has had a career in philanthropy.

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Roundtable Participants

Janet Camarena, Foundation Center
Miki Fukai, SFSU Japanese Students Assn.
Dianne Fukami, filmmaker
Hitoshi Hokamura, Evernote Japan
Hiroshi Inomata, Consul General
Seth Jacobowitz, SFSUAssist. Professor
Dana Lewis, Japan Society of N. California
Kaz Maniwa, U.S. Japan Council
Masahiko Minami, SFSU Professor
Kaoru Miyanouchi, Japanese Mother’s Benefit
Nobuaki Momoi, Japanese Students Assn.
Nobuyuki Okada, Nihon Keizai Shimbun
Allen Okamoto, Asian Realtor Association
Kenji Taguma, Nichi Bei Foundation
Dr. Reiko True, Japan Mental Health Workers
Lori Yamaguchi, Always Dream Foundation
Gillian Yeoh, Give2Asia

About the Author

Ken Yamada is minister of the Berkeley Higashi Honganji and a former journalist who has reported for the Wall Street Journal, USA Today and other news publications. He has lived and studied in Japan.

For most participants, the Dilena Takeyama Center roundtable offered them their first opportunity to exchange experiences about raising money and providing assistance for Japan’s recovery.

—Kimihiro Hoshino
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profit organizations, businesses, media, students and individual citizens leapt into action, soliciting funds, organizing activities and raising awareness for relief efforts, amounting to millions of dollars in donations. Many of those activities continue.

To better understand what happened between Japan and the San Francisco Bay Area starting that fateful day in March 2011 and to examine related dynamics and implications, the Dilena Takeyama Center for the Study of Japan and Japanese Studies at San Francisco State University (SFSU) convened a roundtable discussion comprised of representatives from various organizations who mobilized for Japan earthquake and tsunami relief. The discussion was held on March 1, 2012 at SFSU’s Seven Hills Conference Center. This report is based primarily on that roundtable discussion along with other sources and will attempt to provide a social and historical context for the events of March 11 and the subsequent response of Bay Area organizations and community members.

Moved to Action: Violinist Kaoru Miyanouchi (left) helped a group of Japanese mothers raise money, while real estate agent Allen Okamoto rallied Japantown business leaders.

With a shake and rumble, sirens signal the start of Japan’s triple disaster

At 2:46 p.m. in Japan’s Northeastern Tohoku region, the ground violently began to shake. Unlike other earthquakes, rumbling continued for what seemed an eternity. Walls began to crack, ceilings crumbled and buildings began to collapse. The date was March 11, 2011.

Several seconds passed, then minutes and the shaking continued. Roads ruptured, trees tumbled, pipes burst. Children, teenagers, adults and the elderly ducked for cover—under desks, doorways, away from windows—or they escaped outside, away from falling structures. Many people were lucky, escaping harm, injury and death; many people were not so lucky. For more than five minutes, the ground brutally shook. Finally the roaring stopped and an eerie calm descended across the land. It was the

—Kimihiro Hoshino
strongest earthquake ever recorded in Japan, hitting a monster 9.0 magnitude.

Then sirens began wailing. Residents along the coast—in fishing villages, farmhouses, small towns and elsewhere—knew immediately what the sound meant: head for the hills, higher ground or some other elevated place. A tsunami was rushing towards them.

Approximately 45 miles off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture, the giant quake jolted the sea floor, pushing huge waves up and towards the coastline. As the waves rushed forward, they swelled to 30 feet high, overwhelming sea walls, smashing piers, flooding roads, carrying away boats, cars, trees, telephone poles, homes, buildings and almost everything else standing in their path. Huge waves pushed onto roadways and up narrow pathways, between buildings, propelling them forward at even greater heights and force. Waves mercilessly carried away, drowned or buried people who could not escape. Seawater traveled as far as six miles inland, wreaking havoc and destruction everywhere.

In Fukushima Prefecture, tsunami waves washed over the Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, knocking out electrical power. Flooding crippled its backup power system. Without electricity, the plant’s safeguards failed. In the hours and days that followed, the plant became the scene of two explosions, the meltdown of three reactors and plumes of radiation released into the air, sea and land. People living near the reactor, who had miraculously escaped harm from the earthquake and tsunami, now faced a third and more troubling danger in what has been called the greatest nuclear disaster since the Chernobyl nuclear crisis 25 years earlier. Authorities evacuated residents living within a 30-kilometer (18-mile) radius of the plant.

The triple disaster caused staggering losses: 15,850 people dead, 3,283 people missing, 6,011 injured and 429,180 people homeless, according to the National Policy Agency and Japanese government figures as of February this year. More than 128,000 buildings were destroyed and more than 674,000 buildings were damaged, amounting to losses estimated by the World Bank of $235 billion. As rescue crews frantically dug through rubble, Prime Minister Naoto Kan called the disaster the nation’s worst crisis since World War II.
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Twitter, Facebook accelerate reactions around the world

The day the earthquake hit, San Francisco-resident Hitoshi Hokumura was chatting with colleagues in Japan via a Skype videoconference call. They told him the ground was badly shaking. “It was in real time,” Hokumura recounted at the roundtable.

To find out what was happening, Hokumura began following Twitter feeds from eyewitnesses in Japan that immediately began popping up on the Internet, checking the short messages for updates and news. Emails flew back and forth between co-workers, friends, acquaintances and Hokumura. “I really got a sense that something amazing was happening across the ocean,” he recalled. After just 12 hours, he wrote a blog posting, pledging the month’s profits from his company Evernote Japan to help disaster victims. His company offered free upgrades to its communication software to aid relief efforts. He also posted rescue information. The blog posts were tweeted, or sent out thousands of times, he said.

A network of Facebook friends, who were scattered across various countries, wondered how they could help. Hokumura referred them to the San Francisco-based Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCNC), which he found after searching the Internet for a trustworthy place taking donations. JCCNC previously collected donations for Japan’s 1995 Kobe earthquake victims and was once again starting a fund to aid the country in its new crisis.

For nearly four decades, JCCNC had been a stalwart in the city’s Japanese American community, providing programs, cultural classes, sports, social events and other activities for youths, adults and seniors. The center’s staff and many volunteers, based in Japantown, rushed to action with a caller hotline, donation website and administrative support. Local television station NBC-11 in San Jose partnered with the center in broadcasting a telethon that announced 100 percent of donations would go towards disaster relief. The center’s ties to the Japanese American community and Japanese culture, along with its proven track record fundraising for Kobe earthquake relief, gave it instant credibility among a multitude of people searching the Internet for ways to help.

“With the advent of the Internet and social media, we were shocked at how successful we were initially,” Dianne Fukami, filmmaker and JCCNC board president, told participants at the roundtable. Nichi Bei Weekly, the lone remaining Japanese American newspaper in San Francisco, provided thousands of dollars in free advertising to support JCCNC’s fundraising efforts, according to Kenji Taguma, president of nonprofit Nichi Bei Foundation, the newspaper’s publisher.

Exposure through the World Wide Web and social media Web sites such as Facebook and Twitter, allowed JCCNC to extend its reach beyond the San Francisco Bay Area across the United States and throughout the world. JCCNC eventually raised more than $4 million from more than 25,000 donors worldwide, making it one of the biggest Japan relief fundraisers among nonprofit organizations in the United States.

News of the disaster struck Japanese students at San Francisco State University, with an urgent desire to help their native country. Members of the university’s Japanese Students Association (JSA) quickly launched a fundraising drive for relief efforts, simply by setting up tables on campus and asking fellow students for money. “We spontaneously started collecting donations every day from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. three days after the earthquake and tsunami happened,” said Miki Fukai, Japanese Students Association president. Students and faculty met the plea for help with an outpouring of support, contrib-
Crisis taps into region’s cultural ties and community networks

The Bay Area’s sudden outpouring of support for Japan wasn’t mere serendipity. The region forged deep ties with Japan beginning in 1860, shortly after the country opened its borders to foreign relations and trade after more than 200 years of isolation. Among the first in a wave of Japanese people to settle in the United States landed on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, an immigrant group that eventually started America’s first Japantown in San Francisco and grew into the country’s largest Asian ethnic population at the time with Japanese American communities spawning throughout the West Coast. Today, San Francisco and the south Bay Area city of San Jose, along with Los Angeles, are home to the last three remaining Japantowns in the United States.

Over the decades, America’s Japanese population ebbed and flowed during several tumultuous years of racial discrimination and war. Ironically, the Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire forced many of the early immigrants to move from the city center to an outlying neighborhood that eventually became known as Nihonmachi or Japantown. In 1913 during a rising tide of racism, lawmakers enacted California’s Alien Land Law aimed squarely at Japanese immigrants, which blocked them from owning land. The California Supreme Court invalidated the law in 1952.

At the start of America’s entrance to World War II, the lives of first generation Japanese Americans, called Issei, and their second generation children, called Nisei, were suddenly disrupted when the entire Japanese American community in the Bay Area, as well as communities all along the West Coast, were uprooted from their homes and forced into internment camps under armed guards far inland in remote rural areas. They weren’t allowed to return until the war’s end, at which time they began life anew, starting with finding work and a place to live. This unique Japanese American experience of rebuilding lives after a sudden and forced upheaval presents an historic if not uncanny parallel with the experience currently faced by present day earthquake and tsunami survivors in Japan.

America’s first Japanese immigrants lived with a strong sense of cultural values based on communal effort and traits known in Japanese as gaman (to endure hardship) and gambaru (perseverance). Many Issei people have described their early lives and wartime experiences with such words. Similarly, the spirit of gaman and gambaru can been seen today in people working to rebuild their lives after the Japan earthquake and tsunami.

A complex history has produced a diverse present-day Bay Area population of American-born people of Japanese ancestry that today comprises multi-generational families, inter-marriage with other ethnic groups and newer Japan-born residents known as “Shin-Issei” (new first generation), many of them professionals attracted to jobs in Silicon Valley. The Bay Area is home to an estimated 68,000 people of Japanese descent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 report. Subsequently, Japanese cultural traditions remain strong, practiced through food, traditional dance, martial arts, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, music, language and other arts. The diverse population also means a variety of social, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds, naturally reflecting varying degrees of sentiment about Japan, ranging from strong identification to apathy and disinterest.

Economically, the Bay Area historically served as a major gateway between Japan and the United States
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for business and technology, a function that continues to thrive today. Silicon Valley is home to major American technology companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Yahoo, Intel, and Hewlett-Packard. Consequently, Fujitsu, Hitachi, Toshiba, Sony, Canon and hundreds of other Japanese companies such as have offices in the region.

The confluence of history, immigration, culture and business arguably cultivates a special awareness and appreciation of Japan and its relationship to the United States among Bay Area residents. The March 11 calamity became a unifying force that galvanized many of them to action for a country in need.

“In Silicon Valley, there is a large, growing Japanese entrepreneurial community,” Dana Lewis, past president of the Japan Society of Northern California, explained at the roundtable. “Everyone said they weren’t networking much or doing anything together and were scattered.” After the disaster occurred, “they were talking to each other on Twitter and other communications. This seems to have reconnected these young people.”

SFSU’s Momoi added: “Before the earthquake, there were fewer members of the Japanese Students Association. Afterwards, we sent out emails to all Japanese students. So many students we had never seen replied and got involved with our activities… In that sense, the younger generation changed after the earthquake.”

That sense of mission seemingly reverberated straight out of Japan, where after the disaster legions of young people quickly pitched in to help. On trips to Japan in past years, Fukami remembers community members expressing concern over Japanese young people who seemed at the time like they were apathetic and didn’t want to work. “The disaster has given young people an opportunity to re-engage and really help Japan,” she said. “I really felt a buzz and energy among the young people. Some people likened it to a blank slate in which they can try new ideas and new things.”

Hiroshi Inomata, consul general of Japan, provided a briefing on the Japanese government’s progress in repairing highways, rail lines, power plants and ports.

—Kimihito Hoshino
At the roundtable, participants discussed examples of charitable giving to Japan relief efforts. For example, nonprofit foundations worldwide raised nearly $279 million, more than half of which came from the United States. Included is $17.3 million raised from California-based foundations. California ranked second only to New York, whose donations were concentrated among fewer donors. Nearly half of those contributions came from the nine counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. According to Janet Camarena, director of the San Francisco office of the Foundation Center, if the Bay Area were considered a state, it would rank seventh overall in contributions among states.

Several Bay Area-based organizations and companies contributed to a total of $5.6 million collected by Give2Asia, a San Francisco non-profit foundation that’s using the money to support long-term recovery activities in Northeastern Japan, according to Give2Asia senior program officer Gillian Yeoh. Donating organizations included the Japan Society of Northern California, Keizai Society (a Silicon Valley-based business and professional networking organization), and University of San Francisco’s Japan Policy Research Institute, along with corporate donors such as Symantec, Adobe Systems and financial services company State Street. Donations also came from charity group Artists Help Japan, started by Dice Tsutsumi, an art director at Pixar Animation Studios, who called upon the art community to donate works for an auction that raised $200,000.

The top five donors with Bay Area-based headquarters or offices were Fujitsu, Chevron, Cisco Systems, Novellus and Applied Materials, Camarena said.

Many individuals played crucial roles in spearheading grassroots fundraising. For instance, Kaoru Miyanouchi told how she and other Japanese mothers living on the San Francisco peninsula banded together after hearing news of the disaster. “We were feeling helpless thinking about the impact on people, especially the children in the Tohoku area,” she said. “We were inspired to action.” Miyanouchi, a professional violinist and mother of a two-year-old child, and other mothers, quickly formed a charity group, tirelessly volunteering their time and energy over several months. They eventually organized a benefit concert called “Play for Japan 2011,” featuring world-class violinist Anna Akiko Meyers, who agreed to perform for free. The event raised $50,000 in a single night, which included a $10,000 donation from the...
famous violinist herself. The funds were quickly distributed to four relief organizations in Japan. “There was overwhelming support, not only from the mom’s group and their friends, but also from the community and the entire area,” Miyanouchi said. “It was very overwhelming and moving.”

San Francisco realtor Allen Okamoto helped rally fellow members of the Asian Real Estate Association of America, a national organization he co-founded that now represents 12,000 members and 21 chapters nationwide. “We took advantage of our 501C (nonprofit) status and created a fund to rebuild homes in Japan,” explained Okamoto, a San Francisco State University alumnus. The group so far raised $500,000 and continues to raise funds aimed at building permanent homes for tsunami victims. However, that goal remains elusive as rebuilding efforts up until now have been focused on temporary housing, he said.

Donations collected by the Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco totaled $2 million in 2011. Other people, organizations, companies and governments across the globe also contributed to Japan’s relief efforts, amounting to billions of dollars in donations. The Japanese Red Cross Society, which has been a primary conduit for donations, reported that by February 2012, it distributed $4.5 billion (302 billion yen) to 15 prefectures to assist survivors.

Mental health advocates point to social and emotional needs

In addition to financial assistance, Bay Area groups provided other services and forms of support. Dr. Reiko Honma True, a clinical psychologist and former deputy director of San Francisco Public Health, helped provide training and support to nonprofit workers from stricken areas in Japan. The group of a dozen Japanese people, including a teacher, nurse, minister and several YMCA helpers, came to San Francisco for a week of training, funded by a grant from JCCCN. They met with firefighters, who talked about suicide prevention, visited a high school where they learned about emergency counseling services, saw the city’s mobile library unit, and even visited the local branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) to learn about dealing with loss related to pets and other animals.

The workers “have to encounter many people who are psychologically distressed,” Dr. True said, “and they were able to get some ideas on how to talk to them and give them some relief.”

Dr. True, other mental health professionals and social workers in the Bay Area formed the Nichi-Bei Care Network to provide support and training related to trauma caused by the disaster. The group has grown to 45 members, many of whom have gone to Japan to offer assistance, she said. Plans include providing support and guidance to people in Japan via the Internet.

Olympic skating gold medalist and Bay Area native Kristi Yamaguchi, with former Sumo wrestler Jesse Kahaaulua, led an 18-person delegation on a goodwill tour called “Project Aloha” to disaster-stricken areas last fall sponsored by her Always Dream Foundation and the JCCCN. The group included musicians, hula dancers, community activists and Kahaaulua, who under the name “Takamiyama” became famous as the first foreign-born wrestler in Japan to win a top division championship during the 1970s. They traveled to Tokyo, Iwaki, Kesennuma, Sendai and Ishinomaki, visiting schools, shelters and community centers and giving performances featuring Hawaiian music, dance, and food. They especially focused on children, visiting 18 daycare and preschool facilities, where they distributed art supplies in a program called Crayons for Japan, an Always Dream Foundation initiative focused on children.

“We were the first delegation to visit the Fukushima area because of fear of contamination,” said Lori Yamaguchi, Always Dream Foundation executive director. Residents told the delegation how some people from outside areas shunned them, fearing they somehow carried deadly radiation. “One of the hardest things to see and hear about were stories of discrimination,” Yamaguchi said. Children who had lost parents and loved ones greeted the group with smiles and laughter. She said, “It gives you a glimmer of hope.”

Also last fall, filmmaker Fukami traveled to Japan to shoot video for a film focused on rebuilding efforts, various support groups, how donations are being spent and their impact. She met with the Always Dream delegation and turned her camera on the group. At the roundtable, she showed a “rough cut” version of the film, featuring a short segment on the Project Aloha tour.
Nobuyuki Okada
Nihon Keizai Shimbun

In the aftermath of the disaster and out of the ruins arose various ad hoc groups of volunteers, friends, neighbors, social workers, teachers, health care professionals, and other community-minded folks, both professionals and nonprofessionals, providing much needed services and supplies, especially where government aid was slow-in-coming or nonexistent. Consequently, the role of nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations in Japan quickly grew in importance to a people unaccustomed to asking for outside help.

At the roundtable, San Francisco attorney and U.S. Japan Council senior vice president Kaz Maniwa, talked about a group he led of seven Japanese American professionals to the Tohoku area in September last year to offer support to such newly formed organizations. “Everyone in that group had a strong background in working with nonprofit organizations,” he said. “The people we met were young, had a lot of spirit and commitment, but they didn’t have a lot of experience sustaining a nonprofit group.”

The Americans stressed to the Japanese the importance of creating self-sustaining organizations, dedicated to helping others while generating funds that pay for operating costs. “It’s like developing a social business venture project,” Maniwa said. The group worked with an afterschool-tutoring program that hired teachers from a school destroyed by the tsunami. Other examples include a restaurant that provided jobs to people with disabilities and a community space comprised of a park and restaurant, each helping to support the other.

“The Japanese people are very proud and they don’t want to just say ‘give me money to get started again,’” Mainwa explained. “The idea is to create these opportunities where people can maintain their dignity and feel they are doing something productive and not just getting handouts.”

Radiation fears stir anxiety and new controversies energize citizen activism

Other roundtable participants talked about Japan’s mounting challenges, especially coping with nuclear disaster. In the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi reactor meltdown, the country shut down all of its 54 nuclear power plants, at least temporarily eliminating its nuclear energy production from previously 40 percent of total electricity generation.

Facing protests, complaints and grave concerns from citizens, environmental groups, parents, politicians, regulators and others, Japan quickly reversed course on its formerly pro-nuclear energy policy, a decision that adds an economic burden on an already overstretched economy. “This is a complicated issue,” said Masahiko Minami, SFSU professor of Japanese. “Nuclear power plants are being stopped… I’m concerned about the direction of Japan’s economy.”

Fallout from radiation fears reached a fevered pitch with fellow Japanese refusing to buy produce, milk, meat and other products coming from Fukushima and adjoining areas, choking a flow of capital to people who need it most. “After an initial groundswell of sympathy and support for the stricken Northeast coast, a vocal segment of the public, obsessed with avoiding even insignificant levels of radioactivity seems to be turning its back on the region,” said Seth Jacobowitz, SFSU humanities assistant professor, reading from a Bloomberg news report. He gave examples how cleanup efforts were hampered by protests by residents of other prefectures against burying rubble and debris from stricken areas, fearful of radioactive contamination despite official assurances to the contrary. “Compassion lost out to a Japanese version of ‘not in my backyard,’” Professor Jacobowitz said, quoting the story.

News coverage of an unfolding nuclear disaster—which was often confusing, conflicting, misleading and sometimes outright erroneous—further stoked fears and anxieties, conjuring nightmarish visions of
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mass evacuations, radiation poisoning and slow death by cancer.

Media on both sides of the Pacific struggled with how to report the story, amid murky data, feelings of urgency, and a lack of official information, according to Nobuyuki Okada, Silicon Valley bureau chief of Nihon Keizai Shimbun, a major Japanese business newspaper. Mr. Okada observed Japanese media tended to take a cautious approach, while American counterparts were more aggressive. Considering people’s lives were at stake, reporting must be done carefully, he said. Conflicting information which shot across the Internet through social media Web sites were mostly unreliable and unusable to the press. Okada said: “Imagine if a writer asks a university professor if food is safe from radiation and he answered ‘yes and no,’ what kind of article are you going to write?”

Final thoughts:
Journey to full recovery may take a decade

In the year since the March 11 disaster, Japan made major strides in its recovery efforts. Consul General of Japan in San Francisco Hiroshi Inomata told the roundtable that damaged major highways, high-speed rail lines, electrical power and major ports already were either fully operational or close to it. This year (2012), the gross domestic product (GDP) real growth rate is estimated to be 1.7 percent, up from an estimated minus .9 percent last year, he said. Prior to the disaster, the real GDP growth rate last year was estimated to be 1.6 percent.

The Japanese government allocated $225 billion towards relief and reconstruction efforts and offers special corporate tax exemptions and other financial incentives to encourage companies to help. “We are seeking corporate support and cooperation with the Japanese central government,” Counsel General Inomata said.

The earthquake and tsunami pummeled factories and producers in Northeastern Japan, disrupting supply chain lines, severely limiting output of major manufacturers such as Toyota and nearlycrippling an already ailing national economy. In 2010, the country dropped to the world’s third largest economy—overtaken by juggernaut China—after ranking second only to the United States since 1967.

Despite its successes thus far, the country faces tremendous challenges and enormous costs to rebuild, repair and rejuvenate lost factories, farms, homes, agricultural land and fishing ports. Many people remain homeless and the bodies of thousands of victims have yet to be recovered. Entire villages remain flattened, historic places that may or may not be rebuilt. Many jobs—already in short supply before the disaster—have all but disappeared. Consequently, young people have fled the region in droves. Meanwhile news media recently reported a continuing nuclear crisis at the damaged reactor site.

Roundtable participants predicted recovery efforts will take years, possibly a decade until victims and their communities return to a semblance of their past life. Consequently, Bay Area community groups have vowed to continue fundraising efforts, with the latest focus on an upcoming one-year anniversary remembrance of the disaster. A major challenge they said would be reminding people of the continuing need to support relief work.

History almost inevitably will view Japan from a pre-March 11 and post-March 11 perspective. A more engaged citizenry, increased volunteerism, greater charitable giving and more partnerships extending across Japan’s borders to other countries already characterize the new era. That evolution is being reflected in the San Francisco Bay Area, a region closely tied to Japan over a long and rich past. The calamity that shook Japan sent shockwaves across the Pacific, acutely felt in the Bay Area, inspiring action, charity and cooperation, opening a new chapter in a relationship bound by history, immigration, culture, commerce and time.
San Francisco State University launched the Dilena Takeyama Center for the Study of Japan and Japanese Culture to promote leadership and new voices in the field of U.S.-Japan relations.

The center was made possible by a generous gift from Dr. Kay Takeyama Dilena, a distinguished alumna and professor emerita of business. With her gift, Dr. Dilena honors her brother, Yasuo Takeyama, a Hiroshima survivor, and her husband, James G. Dilena, a Pearl Harbor survivor.

Jon Funabiki, a professor of journalism, is the center’s founding executive director.

Jill Shiraki served as roundtable program manager. The Dilena Takeyama Center also extends appreciation to Brittney Barsotti, Valerie Bush, Kimihiro Hoshino, Sandy Kajiyama and Ken Maeshiro for their invaluable assistance.

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About the Dilena Takeyama Center

Homeland Beckons: Miki Fukai, president of the SFSU Japanese Students Association, describes how her group raised nearly $30,000 in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

—Kimihiro Hoshino