

For Immediate Release

**GO FOR BROKE NATIONAL EDUCATION CENTER
ANNOUNCES NATIONAL TORCHBEARERS PROGRAM
TO ENSURE THE LEGACY OF THE NISEI WWII SOLDIERS
FOR GENERATIONS TO COME**

LOS ANGELES (June 9, 2023)—Eighty years ago, the Japanese American soldiers of WWII fought to fulfill America’s Promise—the promise that in the United States, no one is to be judged by one’s color, country of origin or faith. These sons and daughters of immigrants from Japan, a nation at war with the U.S., embodied the highest ideals of American equality.

Today, that inspiring history serves as the foundation for a group of community engaged young adults dedicated to equality and social justice. Go For Broke National Education Center (GFBNEC), a national nonprofit that promotes the Japanese American veterans’ legacy of courage, sacrifice and obligation to others, currently sponsors the GFBNEC Los Angeles Torchbearers. This diverse group of Americans in their 20s and 30s embody the Go For Broke spirit and are committed to ensuring that the soldiers’ legacy will be carried by future generations.

“The legacy of the Nisei veterans is fighting for the future of those they loved, but also for those that they would never know,” says Emiko Kranz, a Yonsei (fourth generation) Torchbearer and member of GFBNEC’s Board of Directors. To effect lasting change, the Torchbearers seek to build alliances well beyond the Asian American community. “We can take the veterans’ story as inspiration to support others who might be in communities who face discrimination,” says Staci Toji, a Torchbearer and member of GFBNEC’s Board of Directors.

In June of 2023, GFBNEC will be expanding the Torchbearers Program nationally and will be working with several partners from across the country including San Francisco (*Japanese Community Youth Council*); Denver (*Sakura Foundation*); Chicago (*Japanese American Service Committee*); Honolulu (*Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai’i*), Irvine, Calif. (*Congregation Shir Ha-Ma`a lot*); and Middlebury, Vermont (*Middlebury College*).

Young adults from each region, representing an array of identities including ethnicity, religion, sexual and gender identity and ability will be participating in this impactful year-long program. “The Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai’i (JCCH) is pleased to have our Ho’ohana Cohort members participate in the inaugural GFBNEC Torchbearer National Convening,” says Nate Gytoku, President & Executive Director. “The convening is an excellent opportunity for our young professionals to network and form future support systems. By building a community, we help to ensure their success.”

The participants will attend a national gathering in Los Angeles, “Listen, Empathize & Engage,” during the last weekend in June. The meetings will focus on identity and social dynamics

including privilege, power and positionality, which, if not understood and addressed, can lead to hatred and violence. The history of the Japanese American men and women soldiers of WWII, including the Military Intelligence Service and the 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat team, the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in U.S. history, will be the foundational exemplar of integrity, the courage to right a wrong and obligation to others.

Recently, the Torchbearers have hosted a range of activities to promote civic engagement. The group raised money for Ukrainian humanitarian relief, hosted a symposium on African American reparations and participated in discussions around ethnic and cultural identity. In the summer of 2022, a group of Torchbearers visited the Denver, Colorado community to learn of the history and issues facing the area. The group also supports broader GFBNEC educational and community programs, including regular cleanups of Nisei soldiers' graves at Evergreen Cemetery in East Los Angeles.

Lindsey Sugimoto, a Yonsei whose grandfather served in the Military Intelligence Service, believes that sharing the history of the Nisei soldiers can build cross-cultural understanding. "As our country gets more diverse, and hopefully more accepting, we need to appreciate that heroes come in all shapes, sizes, races and genders."

GFBNEC plans to continue to build a robust nationwide community of Torchbearers. "We realized that for the veterans' legacy to be truly of value to contemporary America, we needed to expand not only regionally, but in all aspects of diversity—ethnicity, culture, religion and sexual orientation," says Mitchell Maki, Ph.D., GFBNEC President and Chief Executive Officer.

Maya Hernandez, Ph.D., GFBNEC's Senior Manager of NextGen Programs and a former Torchbearer, notes that young people find themselves bombarded by fast-paced social media content that mostly comes in the form of sound bites. "There aren't many safe spaces, in particular for the younger generations, where true dialogue across differences can occur," Hernandez says. "It is critical to provide the tools, the support, and, most important, the opportunity for such discussions to take place."

To learn more about the story and legacy of the Nisei soldiers of WWII, and GFBNEC's National Torchbearers Program, visit goforbroke.org.

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Note to Media: "Go For Broke" was the motto of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Army unit composed of Japanese Americans from Hawai'i and the mainland. The term was Hawaiian slang for "shooting the works," or risking everything for the big win in gambling—as the Nisei soldiers did while fighting in the field in WWII and facing prejudice at home in the U.S.

About Go For Broke National Education Center

Go For Broke National Education Center (GFBNEC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that educates the public on the valor of Japanese American veterans of WWII and their contributions to democracy. Our goal is to inspire new generations to embody the veterans' core values of courage, sacrifice, equality, humility and patriotism. Founded in 1989, GFBNEC maintains the Go For Broke Monument and the interactive *Defining Courage* exhibit in downtown Los Angeles, as well as extensive oral histories and archives, education and training programs and other initiatives. For more information, please visit www.goforbroke.org.

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