



TONARI GUMI  
Newsletter

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## Dear Members, Volunteers & Friends of Tonari Gumi,

For the past few months, Tonari Gumi Telephone Buddy volunteers have been very busy connecting with our TG community. Cheery chats to lift our spirits and lots of wonderful memories have been shared.

One of the messages was received from a senior who received a call as part of TG's Telephone Buddy program. Jean Kamimura is a pioneer within the community and was a key leader during the Redress campaign which ultimately resulted in an apology from the PM and \$21,000 each for every member of the Japanese Canadian community who was born prior to April 1, 1949. She was also a very early Tonari Gumi volunteer. Our Telephone Buddy volunteer said that it's a treat to have the opportunity of phoning her each week and learning about many of her experiences during that period.



***“Hi, Thank you very much for the phone call. It was very much appreciated. It was wonderful to get to know each other better... It is great to know that there are people out there looking out for us "old folks".***

***Thank you for forwarding me the TG newsletter. I have a special connection with TG which goes way back to 1980 at the office on Hastings Street. There were so many elderly Issei's then - both men and women. Many were living in the area. I volunteered full time, five days a week, setting up the office procedures to ease the workload of the three men - Take-san, Roy and Ken. Lilliam Kadota came to help me. We were the first Nisei volunteers there. The Nisei grass root Redress group started here. Lil and I knew Mrs. Tagashira from Church. She convinced us to talk to the members about Redress. We had Mrs. Kobayakawa and Mr. Iwanaka join our Committee. Tonari Gumi members supported the Redress campaign from the beginning. Oops, sorry. I didn't mean to talk about past history. Thanks for all your hard work. ”***

Jean

Thank you Jean, the Spirit of TG is still alive and beating strongly.

Imagine that 46 years ago, as a “newer organization then”, Tonari Gumi was considered “brash young upstarts,” by some, who regarded the TG volunteers “as unmannerly hippies or communists.” Yet, TG emerged as a result of a community need, where older Issei’s returning after the war, were isolated in Powell Street, where once a lively Japanese community existed. Visitations and shared meals, later a drop-in centre, evolved as TG responded to meet the need at that time.

Over years of providing community services and programs, funding has frequently been a problem for TG with cutbacks in government grants and other funding disruptions. However, with the support from the Vancouver Coastal Health, the federal New Horizons for Seniors, United Way, City of Vancouver, private legacy bequests, member donations along with community fundraising efforts like the Powell Street Festival and our Annual Bazaar, Tonari Gumi has been able to continue supporting our community.



**DONATE TO  
TONARI GUMI &  
Receive a Tonari Gumi  
face mask lovingly  
made by our seniors.**

The Japanese Community Volunteers Association, or Tonari Gumi as we are known in Japanese, is busy reaching out to help isolated and vulnerable seniors during the current coronavirus pandemic. Although our current lockdown and social distancing is necessary to get this virus under control, many seniors find themselves isolated from their friends and family. For those who were alone to start with, the restrictions have made their situation even worse. Tonari Gumi staff and volunteers are working hard to provide information and help. We need your help to keep going.

**In May and  
June 2020, for  
every minimum  
\$25 donated to  
Tonari Gumi, we  
will send you a tax  
receipt and a  
handmade face  
mask\* with our  
special TG logo.**

**SHOW YOUR  
SUPPORT!**

Donate by cheque  
or [Online](#)



\*Max 10 masks per donation

JAPANESE COMMUNITY  
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While our doors have been closed recently due to Covid 19, TG has still been active behind the scenes, keeping in touch with our seniors. With the loss of one of our sources of income from our programs and activities; plus, with the possible loss of the Powell Street Festival – one of our major fundraisers, we hope that you will reflect on the Spirit of Tonari Gumi and continue to support us.

In May and June 2020, for every minimum \$25 donated to Tonari Gumi, we will send you a tax receipt\* and a handmade face mask with our special TG logo.

\*For Online Payment, receipt will be mailed directly from Canada Help.

For more details, please follow this link: <http://www.tonarigumi.ca/tg-masks-for-donation/>

## Powell Street Festival Update:

In telephone conversations with some of our members, it always comes up – “what about Powell Street Festival this year?” The Provincial Government has set a deadline of May 9 to transition people out of encampments, including the one at Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver.

This came as a result of an order by Public Safety Minister and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth under the Emergency Program Act as part of B.C.'s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently the Oppenheimer Park is fenced off as the campers are moved to hotels and other alternative residences. The extensive damage to the park will then be repaired by the parks department. Due to the restrictions of groups over 50, festivals and large gatherings at this time are not permissible, thus, the Powell Street Festival is still exploring alternative ways to hold our annual celebrations during these unsettling times.

### 🌸 Your Sakura Pictures! 🌸





## The History of Cherry Blossom Trees in Oppenheimer Park:

Before 1942, Oppenheimer Park was the centre of a thriving Japanese Canadian community. On April 16, 1977, with the support of the City of Vancouver, over 70 Issei (First Generation immigrants, many of whom were Tonari Gumi members) completed the planting of 21 Sakura (flowering cherry trees) in the Park to celebrate the 100th year anniversary of Canada's first known immigrant from Japan. The ceremony was also a symbol of reconciliation for recently returned Japanese Canadians, who were not officially allowed to return to the coast until 1949.



Sakura Planting April 1977



Sakura Blossom 2008

“To me 1977 was a time when Japanese Canadians were finally able to talk about their painful history, because they could finally objectify it and speak about it,” Shibata told the Georgia Straight. “There were about 30 years of void there, because many Sansei people [grandchildren of Japanese immigrants] didn't know anything about their parents' and grandparents' past. So, the tree-planting was the beginning of the Powell Street Festival that year, and those Issei [pioneer] people in their late '70s were the ones trying to start talking and relating their experiences. And these trees are called akebono in Japanese, which means 'dawn'.” Yuko Shibata, research associate at UBC's Centre for Japanese Research \*

There have been previous attempts by the city to remove or relocate these trees to make room for new development or renovations, but the community rallied together to preserve them.

*\* by Matthew Burrows on May 14th, 2008 for the Georgia Straight*

## COVID-19 BC May highlights:

On May 12 BC announced their Covid 19 Restart Plan. This plan will be a careful, step-by-step phased process to reopen parts of the economy, schools and health services. These include:

- Under Phase 2, starting in mid-May the following can begin to re-open with appropriate social-distancing
  - re-scheduling of elective surgeries, and medically related services such as dentistry, physiotherapy, chiropractors, etc.
  - Provincial parks for day use, etc.
- Under Phase 3 starting from June 1st if the transmission rate remains low or in decline:
  - An option for children to return to school on a gradual and part-time basis, beginning on June 1.
  - Hotels, movie theatres and the film industry might reopen in the summer.
  - Schools are expected to be open for classes in September.
- Phase 4 will not start until there is at least one of: wide vaccination; "community" immunity; or a broad successful treatment
  - Nightclubs, bars and casinos will not re-open anytime soon; and
  - The ban on gatherings of more than 50 people remains in place until phase 4 is announced.

Latest information can be viewed from here: <http://www.tonarigumi.ca/covid-19-healthdept-latest-news/>



Photo: Nigel Howard Illustration by Geoff Coates

These further openings are contingent on us continuing our good habits:

- Older or more vulnerable people staying home as much as possible,
- keep washing our hands,
- wearing a mask when outside.
- plus, keeping our social distance.

***Moving forward, we need your input - tell us what you have been up to during the past few months in social isolation, have you learned new skills or crafts, do you have suggestions or comments for the newsletter?***

Let us know! We want to hear from you.



***A big thank you to our members who sent in your sakura photos.***

***This month's TG Newsletter Volunteers are:***

***Makiko, Mayumi, Yumiko and Naho***

**If you find this newsletter useful,  
please share this newsletter and website information  
with your family and others in our community.**

**[www.tonarigumi.ca](http://www.tonarigumi.ca)**