

3rd Annual Florin Obon Dance Workshop

Welcoming Newcomers - Demystifying Obon!

by Andy Noguchi

Welcoming newcomers and demystifying Obon – workshop leader and past Florin JACL President Cheryl Miles explained her vision. The July 13th Florin Obon Dance Workshop and the July 17th Buddhist Church of Florin's Obon Festival certainly advanced that dream.

A diverse crowd of 50, including many newer folks, raised their understanding of Obon, Japanese folk dance, and the Nikkei community's premiere festival celebrating through music and dance the gratitude for family and friends who have passed on. Attendees included families with children, college students on summer break, and faithful Nisei generation Obon lovers. The Florin Dharma School and Florin JACL Youth & Family Programs sponsored this 3rd annual event.



Practicing those Obon dance moves July 13th. (photo by Steve Kubo)

In a down-to-earth style, Reverend Peter Inokoji-Kim explained how Buddhist monk Moggallana despaired over his deceased mother's suffering in hell. Moggallana dedicated himself to selfless deeds, earned his mother's release, and then danced for joy, inspiring the Obon celebration. Sensei urged people not to worry about being expert dancers, but to just dance, have fun, and celebrate our past loved ones.

Cheryl Miles, assisted by fellow Hanayagi dancer and sister Michelle Takeda, mother Judie Miyao, and dance instructor Kathy Menda, demonstrated some of the Obon dances. Going beyond traditional Japanese teaching (watch, copy, and learn), Cheryl explained the meaning of dance moves. Several people also volunteered from the audience and tried their hand at the often-challenging Obi sash-tying.

Other speakers included Walter Menda, Florin Dharma School Co-Superintendent, who shared their many religious, social, and cultural activities. John Kanemoto, CSUS student and a Florin JACL youth activist, pitched in by ably MC'ing the workshop.

Since many people had rushed to the early evening workshop, the committee hosted a tasty BBQ hot dog meal, complete with fried chicken and rice ball musubi. Appreciation goes to BBQ master Terry Nishizaki, Fumie and Sam Shimada. Dharma School Co-Superintendent Judy Yuki, aided by daughter Akemi home from U.C. Santa Cruz, whipped up some scrumptious fresh-baked cookies.

Many of the 50 participants joined in the evening's Obon dance practice. Sansei attendee Jane Okubo shared that she hadn't danced in Obon since she was a little girl. Just four days later on July 17th, many of the workshop attendees joined with the 250 dancers at the Florin Obon Festival. CSUS students and sisters Cynthia and Marie Smith had fun dancing, fully equipped with extra yukata summer kimonos and fans provided by thoughtful Marielle Tsukamoto and Cheryl Miles.

A special thanks also goes to our other helpful workshop committee members including Jennifer & Steve Kubo, Twila Tomita, Karen Kurasaki, and Utako Kimura.