



## Saburo Kato (1915–2008) *Patron of the Museum*



Photo: Joseph Mullian

*Saburo Kato with the Imperial Pine outside the Japanese Pavilion during the World Bonsai Convention in 2005.*

**Saburo Kato**, an Honorary Director of the National Bonsai Foundation, died in Omiya, Japan on February 8, 2008. Mr. Kato, acknowledged as the most renowned bonsai master of his generation, was the first prominent ambassador of the philosophy of peace through bonsai and, working with **John Y. Naka**, he was a founder of the World Bonsai Friendship Federation (WBFF). Since the founding of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum in 1976 he was beloved by all who knew him here for his gentle kindness and his steadfast friendship.

When he was born in 1915, his father, **Tomekichi Kato**, was the owner of the Mansei-en Bonsai Nursery and Mr. Kato followed the path of his father in devoting his life to the art of bonsai. In 1925 the family moved to the village of Omiya, establishing another nursery devoted to

growing and selling bonsai. Mr. Kato assumed leadership of the nursery in 1946 and under his guidance it gained the reputation of being the “bonsai Mecca of the world.” Later in life Mr. Kato authored, *Bonsai No Bi (The Beauty of Bonsai)*, which depicts in word and by pictures the story of this remarkable family and their devotion to bonsai.

His hallmark work of art was the design and planting of Ezo spruce forest plantings and he traveled the world revealing his superb craftsmanship of this art form. In 1963 he published a book, *Forest, Rock Planting and Ezo Spruce Bonsai*, on the creation of these unique bonsai plantings. In 2001, the National Bonsai Foundation, under the leadership of **William N. Valavanis**, had this seminal publication translated and reprinted in English.

In addition to his work in creating WBFF, Saburo Kato played a prominent role in the development of the Japanese Bonsai Growers Cooperative and he served as its first President. Then in 1965 he helped to found the Nippon Bonsai Association (NBA) and later served as its Chairman for twenty years (1983–2003).

In 1973 the Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, **John Creech**, approached the NBA with the idea of donating bonsai to the Arboretum as a celebratory gift from the people of Japan to the American people during the 1976 Bicentennial year. While the NBA and its President, **Nobukichi Koide**, welcomed this suggestion, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fearing that the trees would suffer, was opposed

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## President's Letter



This is a time of change and transition at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum.

With the passing of Saburo Kato, we have lost not only one of the most influential and inspirational bonsai masters of the past century but the key Japanese bonsai leader who made the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum possible. His message was simple yet profound: by caring for another living thing like a bonsai, we can deepen our love of nature and each other. The ultimate expression of his philosophy is represented today by the World Bonsai Friendship Federation whose mission is to bring about greater peace and friendship in the world through the art of bonsai and which held its 5th quadrennial World Bonsai Convention in Washington, D.C. in 2005. Kato-sensei's spirit, like the wind carressing the branches of the Ezo spruces he loved so much, will continue to be a constant inspiration to us all.

We are most grateful to Jim Hughes, who recently announced that he plans to retire as Curator, for his years of ded-

icated service to the Museum. First a teacher of English, Jim took up bonsai as a hobby and moved to the Washington area where he began volunteering at the Museum. In 2001, he joined the NBF Board of Directors and, when the assistant curator position opened up, we convinced Jim to turn professional. Upon Jack Sustic's retirement as Curator in 2005, Jim was elevated to the top job, which he has performed with utmost skill and constant concern for the health of the bonsai and penjing in the Museum's collections. Along with the Museum staff and volunteers, we will miss Jim's guiding hand.

Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to write letters to Congress or otherwise support our efforts to defeat the proposed budget cuts that threaten the future of the Museum. We understand that you are being heard in the right places.

As a philosopher said long ago, "nothing endures but change." As the cherry blossoms open in Washington, we move forward to see what new and good things the future holds in store for this Museum.

*Felix*

## CURATOR COLUMN

*By Jim Hughes*

During the year 2008 the Museum and Arboretum staff will be looking at ways to improve the flow of information to the public when they visit the grounds. The study will focus on how best to convey rules of etiquette while in the Museum, guide people through the pavilions and indoor spaces, present background on the history of the Museum, teach basic concepts of bonsai and penjing aesthetics, highlight our most singular treasures, and honor our donors and supporters.

Consultants with expertise in this area will be brought in to meet with Arboretum and Museum staff. A comprehensive analysis of our current methods will be done in order to determine where we are successful and where improvements can be made. We

will review our current signage, our video which gives an overview of the Museum, our cell phone tour, and donor recognition as it exists within the Museum.

Our goal is to maximize our ability to convey information without compromising the beauty and serenity of the surroundings. We want to be able to tell our visitors where they can find the oldest bonsai in the collection, which days we rotate the trees so they don't spend hours photographing the backs of them, what "years in training means", but not have the clutter and distraction of excessive signage. We want to make sure they know where to find the special indoor exhibits of Satsuki azaleas, or ikebana, or fall foliage, on those beautiful days where they would most likely just wander through the outdoor exhibits. We want our visitors to have a positive experience while spending time in the Museum and leave with a better understanding of and appreciation for bonsai.

## SABURO KATO, Patron of the Museum

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to the concept. It was Saburo Kato who stepped into this breach and argued effectively in favor of the offer of 53 trees, giving the rationale that members of the NBA could teach the staff of the Arboretum how to care for the bonsai. The Ministry accepted Mr. Kato's persuasive argument and the gift of friendship was sealed. In 1976, after a year in quarantine, the trees were formally presented to the Arboretum and Saburo Kato was part of the Japanese delegation bestowing the historic offering.



Dedication of the Kato Family Stroll Garden—  
Left to right, front row: John Naka, Naemi Iwasaki, Daizo Iwasaki, Saburo Kato, Yayoi Kato and Arlene Polinsky; rear: Mr. Sato, Minister for Cultural Affairs of the Japanese Embassy, Hiromi Nakaoji, Thomas S. Elias, Ronald Korcak, Jack Sustic and Felix Laughlin.



John Naka, Saburo Kato and Daizo Iwasaki; rear: Ted Tsukiyama, Thomas Elias, Arishige Matsuura and Felix Laughlin.

This was the beginning of the long and happy association between Saburo Kato and the Museum, and he returned to Washington numerous times. Of special mention is his visit in 1999 when he came here to officiate at the presentation of four bonsai from Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi to President William Clinton. The gift included one of Mr. Kato's own masterpieces, an Ezo spruce. Today, all of these trees are part of the Museum's Japanese Collection.

In 2002, he returned to the Museum for the dedication of the *Kato Family Stroll Garden*. This space introduces the visitor to the Japanese Pavilion and honors, not only Saburo Kato and his father, but also his son, **Hatsuji Kato**, and his grandson, **Haruhiko Kato**, who carry on the work of the Kato family in bonsai.

Finally, in 2005, he returned to Washington and the Museum one more time for the 5th World Bonsai Convention, where he was presented with the *WBFF Crystal Sculpture Award* for his work in promoting peace through bonsai. Throughout his life Saburo Kato received many awards, including the *Prime Minister's Medal of Honor* for his promotion of bonsai as an art form and the *Imperial Award of the Fourth Order of the Sacred Treasure* for his part in the founding of the WBFF.

We honor his life here in his own words:

*Bonsai at its highest  
level expresses the  
pursuit of beauty and the  
culmination of simplicity.*

*The soul that loves bonsai  
can bring peace to the world.*

Thank you, Mr. Kato.

Sources for this article came from the book by **Dr. John Creech**, former Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, *The Bonsai Saga: How the Bicentennial Collection Came to America*; from two articles in May/June 2001 and July/August 2001 in *Bonsai Magazine* by **Dr. Thomas S. Elias**, Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, and an essay by **Ted Tsukiyama**, NBF Board Director, in the *World Bonsai Convention 2005 Book*. NBF is very grateful to them for their contributions to this article.

The words of Mr. Kato are from the preface to *Forest, Rock Planting & Ezo Spruce Bonsai* and the epilogue to *Bonsai No Bi*.

## Bonsai Festival

On May 2nd the Board of Directors of NBF will hold its annual meeting at the Museum. This weekend (May 2–May 4) is also the annual Potomac Bonsai Association Weekend, with tree and stone exhibits and a tent filled with vendors of bonsai trees and supplies. In addition to these events there will be demonstrations by two prominent bonsai artists, **Cheryl Manning** and **Shinichi Nakajima**, to make the weekend into a wonderful “Bonsai Festival.”

Cheryl Manning, a member of the NBF Board of Directors, will be styling a tree on Saturday morning. Ms. Manning, of Southern California, served a year-long apprenticeship under the auspices of the Japan Internship Training Program, with bonsai master Yasuo Mitsuya in Toyohashi, Japan and studied with **Ben Oki**, **Harry Hirao**, **Jim Barrett** and the late **John Naka**. She has been an exciting presenter at many demonstrations and workshops across the United States and internationally. In addition, she has written many articles for bon-



Cheryl Manning.

sai publications and edited, for NBF, *John Naka's Sketchbook*.

Shinichi Nakajima, President of the Nippon Growers Association, began his bonsai training at an early age under his father, bonsai master Tsuneichi Nakajima. A graduate of Meiji University, with a degree in Agriculture, he was certified by the Nippon Bonsai Association in 1981.



Shinichi Nakajima.

He has been a participant in Nippon Bonsai Sakufu-ten since its inception in 1976 and has received many awards for his work. Mr. Nakajima has traveled the world teaching bonsai and he is the author of textbooks on the art. He will be styling a juniper donated by **Chase Rosade** in two demonstrations, one on Saturday afternoon and another on Sunday.

## Museum Notes

- ▶ **Jim Hughes**, the fourth Curator in the history of the Museum, will be retiring from the Arboretum at the beginning of May. Jim joined the staff of the Museum in 2002 as Assistant Curator for Plants. Then in July 2005, following the retirement of **Jack Sustic**, he became Acting Curator and was appointed to the position of Curator in November of that year. Jim is grateful for the opportunity that he has had working at the Museum, and he intends to maintain his ties with the Museum in new and different ways.



Poster for the Exhibit.

- ▶ The Museum hosted a *Korean Exhibition in Celebration of the Lunar New Year* from February 7th to March 5th. The exhibit featured viewing stones from Korea and the ink brushwork paintings



Left to right: Kathleen Emerson-Dell, Assistant Curator; Sock-Joong Yoon, Minister for Public Affairs, Embassy of the Republic of Korea; Myung Sook Kim, artist; Young Choe, Museum Volunteer; and Thomas S. Elias, Director of the U.S. National Arboretum.

and pottery of **Myung Sook Kim**, a Korean-American artist. NBF and the Arboretum sponsored a reception in the **Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion** on the evening of February 12th for invited guests, including the Minister for Public Affairs of the Republic of Korea Embassy, **Sock-Joon Yoon**.



Shigeru Yamaki with his grandfather's tree, boxed for winter protection.

- ▶ **Shigeru Yamaki**, grandson of the late Masaru Yamaki who was the donor of the oldest tree in the Museum collections, visited the Museum on March 11th. He first visited his grandfather's tree in 2001. The complete history of the "Yamaki Pine" can be found on the NBF website at: <http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/japanese2.html>.
- ▶ Our apologies to **Amy Forsberg**, the Museum gardener, as we misspelled her name in the last issue of the *NBF Bulletin*.



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*Thank you for your support of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum.*

## Arboretum and Museum Face Severe Budget Reductions

President George W. Bush's Budget for FY09 was released in early February. Prior to release, federal agencies were asked to make extensive reductions to their individual budgets. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) that oversees the U.S. National Arboretum propose to cut \$2 million from the Gardens Unit and the Education and Visitor Services Unit for 2009. This is interpreted as part of an effort by the ARS to concentrate its work in the research realm while limiting public outreach. However, this move undercuts the dual mission of the Arboretum which is to educate the public as well as to conduct research.

The current budget for these two units is just under \$5 million. Thus, if this \$2 million proposed reduction is endorsed by the U.S. Congress, it will severely hamper the operations of these two Units and

thereby directly affect the staff and operations of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. This will mean that at least one staff position in the Museum will be eliminated and programs and exhibits offered to visitors will be curtailed.

NBF and Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA), joined by other Arboretum stakeholder organizations, are actively lobbying Congress on behalf of the Arboretum and the Museum to restore these funds to the Arboretum's budget. Members of NBF are encouraged to join in this effort by writing as soon as possible to their Congressional representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

More information on this important issue can be found on the NBF website at: [http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/whats\\_new.html](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/whats_new.html).