GFBNEC is humbled to administer the inaugural Lawson Iichiro Sakai Memorial Scholarship in honor of World War II veteran, Lawson Sakai. Lawson had a shared enthusiasm for education and preservation of the Japanese American WWII soldiers’ story. After initially being denied the opportunity at the start of the war, he volunteered for the Army in 1943, serving in E Company of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Lawson participated in the liberation of Bruyères, France, and the rescue of the Lost Battalion in 1944, receiving a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Combat Infantryman Badge.

He was always generous in sharing his WWII experiences as a way of remembering those he fought alongside with. As the founder of the Friends and Family of Nisei Veterans, Lawson was a shining example of a leader dedicated to his community.

This scholarship recognizes one high school student and one college student for their outstanding commitment to their community through active participation and support.

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2021 Lawson Iichiro Sakai Memorial Scholarship!
High School Recipient: **TAISHO SHIONO**  
Portola High School; Irvine, CA  
Grade 9 (2020-2021 academic year)

Taisho Shiono is a Sophomore at Portola High School in Irvine, California, where he is an honors student and competes on the varsity swim team. He has always been involved with his Japanese American heritage, such as studying the Japanese language, practicing the martial art of Kendo as a member of the Southern California Kendo Federation (SCKF), and supporting his community through the OCO Youth Club. He aspires to pursue a career in the medical field one day.

**Share why a particular community is meaningful to you.** (up to 100 words)

Although I am a part of many communities, one that I especially identify with is my Kendo community. Kendo is the Japanese martial-art of sword fighting and has been in practice in Southern California for many decades. The kendo community’s meaning to me can be summed up by the Japanese Kendo saying, “Utte kansha, utarete kansha”. The translation is having gratitude towards those you strike, and those that strike you. Everyone in this community supports each other and makes each other stronger, all while competing together. I’ve always felt like I’ve belonged and wanted to contribute to this unique dynamic.

**Lawson is not only admired for his WWII service, but for his ability to connect with people and build community. Describe how you build and support your community.** (up to 250 words)

I’ve experienced first-hand the importance of building and supporting a community through my passion for the martial art of Kendo. Since I started Kendo at age 6 at Costa Mesa Kendo Dojo, I’ve been a part of the Southern California Kendo Federation, a tight-knit community of kendo practitioners.

When Covid-19 hit, shutting dojo doors nationwide, I wanted to find a way to connect with and support my peers. I started by organizing a weekly online practice for my boys team that was preparing to compete in the U.S. Open Kendo Championship. Throughout our 50 team practices during quarantine, it was nice to be able to check up on each other on a weekly basis. I then took this knowledge to help our Senseis set up and administer virtual practices with a network of local dojos twice a week. I’ve participated in more than 120 of these dojo practices that have tallied well over 1,000 participants. Finally, I volunteered to be one of the youth leaders that helped start “SCKF Youth Suburi Together,” a monthly online practice - created for youth, led by youth. Our goal was to create a platform where youth members across Southern California could practice together and feel a sense of community to combat feelings of isolation. Each practice revolved around a different theme, and most recently, I led a “Stop Asian Hate”-themed practice celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage month. We’ve held 13 events, attended by over 600 youths during the pandemic.

**A note from Lawson’s family:** We are deeply impressed by your dedication to your kendo dojo and the way in which you adapted swiftly to support the needs of your community. Lawson was a person of action who was extremely dedicated to his community, and your commitment to your dojo reminds us of his legacy. Congratulations on your accomplishments and best wishes on your future endeavors!
College Recipient: JULIET BOST
University of California, Davis
Third Year (2020-2021 academic year)

Juliet Bost (they/them/their) is a student at the University of California, Davis, majoring in Political Science with a minor in Religious Studies. They are interested in exploring the intersection of political attitudes and religious affiliation within the Asian American diaspora and hope to contribute their experience and scholarship to ongoing discussions of race, religion, and politics in America. In their spare time, Juliet is active in the young Asian American Buddhist community and a board member of their campus Taekwondo club.

Share why a particular community is meaningful to you. (up to 100 words)

The San Mateo Buddhist temple is my home temple, the community where I first developed my voice as a Buddhist, and learned how to be an organizer and activist in my local and regional community. Here, I learned how to care for my elders, and the importance of personal storytelling to build bridges across generational communities. My involvement in the temple community has led me to create my own network of Buddhists, young and old, from all walks of life.

Lawson is not only admired for his WWII service, but for his ability to connect with people and build community. Describe how you build and support your community. (up to 250 words)

As California entered strict lockdown in early 2020, the San Mateo Buddhist Temple transitioned its temple activities to a virtual format, including weekly Sunday services and Wednesday evening study classes. In some ways, this change widened participation of temple members, especially as those who could not travel to the temple could now tune in to service. In other ways, this change alienated and further isolated the temple’s elders, as Zoom and other online communication proved difficult for them. I saw these changes in the community, particularly the inadvertent exclusion of elders from service, and wanted to design programming to build stronger ties among temple members. Because life was suddenly much more sedentary for all of us, I decided to teach Radio Taiso, choreographed Japanese calisthenic exercises. This was perfect in addressing the needs of our community -- an exercise class, cultural experience, and community bonding activity wrapped into one! At first, I felt a little silly swinging my arms in an empty room to energetic piano music. But almost immediately, I received overwhelming support and heartwarming feedback from temple members. One older member who grew up in Japan remembered doing these exercise every day before school -- it was extremely nostalgic for her. Radio Taiso class quickly became a fixture of Sunday service, filling the half-hour pocket of time between early morning chanting and the start of service. Radio Taiso even found its way into other temples, and has connected San Mateo to other temple communities.

A note from Lawson’s family: We are so inspired by your commitment to your temple community. Lawson was extremely active and certainly would’ve appreciated your efforts to engage and support the temple’s elders in such a meaningful way. Congratulations on all of your accomplishments and best wishes on your future endeavors!