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Sawtelle Japantown Festival 2020

The Sawtelle Japantown Association (SJA) Event Planning Committee is proud to announce their inaugural Sawtelle Japantown Festival 2020, a community street celebration (Sawtelle Blvd.) on May 3, 2020 from 11 am – 3 pm. An outdoor stage will showcase performances from talented local groups (judo, odori, hula etc.) with recognition for the 5-year anniversary of the City of LA's formal recognition of 'Sawtelle Japantown'. Activities include walking tours and educational exhibits. A 'Kid Zone' celebrating Children's Day is also planned. The honorary chair of the celebration is Dr. Jack Fujimoto, a long standing leader and author of 'Sawtelle: West Los Angeles's Japantown'.

The WLA and Sawtelle area's long-time Angelenos may remember when it had that slow-paced old town feel – Japanese style - full of modest single family homes meticulously cared for by their 1st and 2nd generation Japanese Americans owners. These homes often characterized by well-tended bonsai trees, lovely gingko trees, decorative rocks and Japanese roof tiles add subtle flair to the neighborhood. You didn't have to trek to downtown Little Tokyo or Southbay for sushi and goods – they were already here along Sawtelle Blvd. This once-sleepy area included a mix of locals and businesses with deep roots dating well before WWII.

Some may feel the old Sawtelle is no more. Sawtelle Japantown has undergone a renaissance of sorts within the past 15 years. One by one the old standbys such as Yamaguchi's, Safe & Save Market, Satsuma Imports and George's Hardware store have gone – replaced by cool kitschy boutiques and delicious multicultural fare heavy on Japanese and other Asian influences. International giants (originally based in Japan) including Tsujita (with 3 artisan noodle shops and 1 sushi bar), Marugame Udon and Nijiya market have become well known anchors to the Sawtelle scene. In the surrounding residential neighborhood within the zip code 90025, gentrification and development continue unabated – an unstoppable tsunami that many believe has trampled old Sawtelle.

But if you look and listen... old WLA Sawtelle is alive and well. Adding old world influence and guidance to this treasured ethnic enclave.

This inaugural street event will be a homage to old as well as a showcase for new. Participants can learn Japanese American history while enjoying short walking tours showing why 'Next Door' has designated this neighborhood as the WLA - Garden District. The multicultural merchants along Sawtelle Boulevard will be celebrated and promoted. Local artists and performers (taiko, dance, etc.) will participate in a fun and safe street event. In another nod to Japanese culture – the event will include a celebration of Japan Children's Day which has been gaining more recognition in the West. Traditional Japanese crafts will be taught to both young and old.

And there is no better time to celebrate this unique neighborhood than at the 5 year anniversary of the name 'Sawtelle Japantown' designated as such back in 2015 by the City of LA in collaboration with residents and historical groups.

Foodies and social influencers may come and go, but Sawtelle Japantown is here to stay, a neighborhood to be enjoyed and cherished by all Angelenos. www.sawtelleja.com ###