A Salute to our Heroes: Tetsu & Kathy Tanimoto

If you've attended a Blind Children's Center event, you may have met Tetsu and his wife Kathy Tanimoto. For the past three decades, they have been among the Center's most dedicated supporters. Tetsu began his professional relationship with the Center in 1988 as a financial adviser working for Merrill Lynch. One of the nation’s top 12 in his field as ranked by numerous industry publications, Tetsu prudently counseled the Center’s Finance Advisory Committee and Board of Directors for years, enabling responsible decisions regarding the Center’s operating budget, investment fund and, ultimately, the future of the organization. Yet Tetsu’s and his family’s involvement with the Center was destined to become far deeper. A few years into his tenure, Tetsu took a tour of the school that would change his life.

“I was walking down the main hall at the Center,” he remembered, “and here comes this little boy, who couldn’t have been much more than two years-old, walking confidently past me with his white cane. I could tell, even at that age, that he was destined for success, despite the fact that he was completely blind.” That child was Center alumnus Gabriel Lopez who is currently chasing down his own dreams in New York City where he recently completed his freshman year at St. John’s University.

Tetsu’s story bears certain resemblances to those of our students. The son of Japanese immigrants who arrived in California in the late 1930s, Tetsu’s humble start helped to shape him into the man he is today. “I grew up poor,” he said, “My father’s business was taken from him just as World War II broke out and my family was placed in an internment camp in Wyoming. But I believe my experiences made me a stronger person.”

Upon returning to Los Angeles, Tetsu worked tenaciously throughout his school years, as both a scholar and a basketball star, and was fortunate enough to earn an academic scholarship to college. “That was one of the most touching experiences of my life,” he recalled.

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A Strong Foundation

We would like to extend a profound thank you to everyone at the Margie & Robert E. Petersen Foundation for their extraordinary support. Through the leadership of President GiGi Carleton, the Petersen Foundation has provided an incredible $1 million in grant funding to the Blind Children’s Center over the course of the past two years. The foundation’s generosity has enabled us to obtain therapeutic chairs for our students who face physical challenges, in addition to a diagnosis of blindness. Last year, they helped launch our innovative, new 3-Year Social Skills Program for children who are blind or visually impaired.

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“Knowing that someone believed in me enough to provide for my education instilled a belief in paying it forward.”

Tetsu and Kathy have done just that, time and time again for the children and families of the Blind Children’s Center. The Tanimotos, who have been married for 49 years now, are frequent sponsors at fundraising events, as well as major donors for the better part of three decades. Tetsu also co-chairs the Mawardi Golf Challenge Committee that has raised an incredible $1.3 million through its 16 years, and has opened doors to countless philanthropic friends and foundations.

Yet for Tetsu, it is never about recognition, acclaim or a pat on the back. His only concern is the cause, whether it is the California Pacific United Methodist Foundation, Family Services of Los Angeles and its Suicide Prevention Center, the Kanel Family Foundation, the Japanese American National Museum, or the Blind Children’s Center.

The Tanimotos inspiring philanthropy has rubbed off on their children and grandchildren. Daughters Ashlee and Taylor who are Delta Gammas continue to support the Center, and their son Marcus has followed in his father’s footsteps, taking over the reins for Tetsu at the Tanabe, McMahon, Tanimoto & Farmer Group and as the lead financial advisor for the Blind Children’s Center. Tetsu and Kathy are truly remarkable people who continue to instill the spirit of giving in their family, and inspire us all with their generosity. Once more, we would like to extend our gratitude to Tetsu, Kathy, and the entire Tanimoto family for their big hearts and unwavering support for the children and families we serve!”

You are our heroes!
The Petersen Foundation was established in 1997 by Robert Petersen and his wife Margie. From the 1950s through the 90s, Robert built a publishing empire around such notable and diverse titles as *Hot Rod*, *Motor Trend*, *Sport*, *Teen* and *Tiger Beat* magazines. Ironically enough, the connection between the Petersen’s and the Blind Children’s Center started many years ago. The Petersen’s beautiful Beverly Hills mansion was designed by famed architect Paul R. Williams, who also designed the main building here at the Center.

Some may know the Petersen name from the prominent Petersen Automotive Museum in the heart of Los Angeles. The Museum just underwent a substantial renovation, and looks sharper than ever at its location on the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue.

We are honored to be affiliated with Robert and Margie Petersen’s incredible legacy of generosity and concern for all of the residents of Los Angeles, particularly its youngest and most vulnerable.