

In Memoriam: Toso Himel

By Jerilyn Paik

I was privileged to serve as Treasurer during the 25 years that Yoshinori H. Toso Himel served as President of the ABAS Law Foundation. We affectionately refer to him by his chosen name, “Toso,” the Japanese verb “to struggle.”

The ABAS Law Foundation is the charitable arm of the Asian/Pacific Bar Association of Sacramento (“ABAS”), and its purpose is to administer law-related educational and charitable projects and to give scholarships to law students who serve the API community. Our work is made possible through donations from friends and from grants.

Toso’s pioneering as a founder of ABAS, as well as serving in leadership positions of many other Asian bar associations, has already been noted.

I wish to pay tribute to my dear friend by highlighting some of Toso Himel’s contributions as President of the ABAS Law Foundation, a position he held from 1999 to 2023.

A Major Source of Funds Is from Grants

In year 2000, when Toso started his reign as President of the ABAS Law Foundation, as a result of efforts from Toso (and **Prof. Clark Kelso** of McGeorge School of Law), the Foundation received and administered a \$30,000 grant. Under Toso’s leadership and efforts, more grants were to follow.

In 2014, Toso obtained a \$47,400 grant from the National Park Service, which grant funded research focused on Tule Lake concentration camp. The work was carried out by **Barbara Takei** and by historian **Roger Daniels**. The Foundation is indebted to Barbara, as we know that a loving and supportive partner encourages and elevates achievements.

In 2019, Toso was responsible for obtaining a \$10,000 grant from the California Civil Liberties Public Education program for a showing of **Jean Sakata**’s film, “Hold These Truths,” which had two showings, including one free to the public, at the California Museum, Sacramento, California.

Toso Encouraged Donations Through Fundraising

The Foundation held annual wine tastings at the Pavilions from years 2003-2016, which was not only successful in raising funds, but brought visibility to the Foundation for future supporters. Toso was integral in getting donors to attend and contribute.

The other major fundraiser of the Foundation is the annual golf tournament. Toso was not a golfer, but as President he would help with the tournament, and he always made a point to attend the awards ceremony that followed so that he could welcome everyone on behalf of the Foundation.

When I took over as golf chair, I was suddenly required, at one point, to go out of town, and Toso stepped in on short notice to chair the tournament. Toso never said “no” unless it was impossible (and for Toso, nothing was impossible).

The Speaker Series

In celebration of the Foundation's 20th anniversary in year 2017, Toso orchestrated the "Speaker Series" which the Foundation has maintained over these last nine (9) years. The series opened with **Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye** speaking on civics, and it was followed with a panel on bail reform with now **Attorney General Rob Bonta**, and then **Dale Minami** speaking so powerfully on 'empowering the community.'

The inaugural Speaker Series closed with a presentation of **Abby Ginzberg/Ken Schneider**'s film "And Then They Came For Us" at the Crest Theater. The film was attended by nearly 800 supporters, who also got to participate in a Q&A with a stellar panel. The panel addressed the then "Muslim ban" among other issues raised by the film.

Credit for the almost sold out crowd goes to Toso, by his reaching out to the media and to community organizations, including CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) - Sac Valley Chapter, Florin JACL, and SAPFF (Sacramento Asian/Pacific Film Festival).

The Tule Lake project inspired Toso to write an article entitled "Americans' Misuse of 'Internment'," which was published in 2016 by the *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*. The fact that the National Park Service and other organizations (such as the JACL and Densho) rely on this article, speaks to the significance of Toso's work on the misuse of the word "internment."

Toso's legal work and law career was with the Department of Justice, but his community and social justice work was largely through the ABAS Law Foundation in his last 25 years.

We will miss Toso's leadership, his calm demeanor, and his dedication to ending unlawful discrimination. Yoshinori H. Toso Himel leaves a rich legacy through his work with the ABAS Law Foundation.

We honor Toso by following his example of leading with courage and kindness; for fighting social wrongs with civility and strength, and in striving for justice with integrity and fairness.

In deepest respect, Jeri Paik