



WHITTIER UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 10, 2024 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Dedicates Whittier High School Art Building to Former Art Teacher, WWII Hero

WHITTIER – Longtime Whittier resident Yoshio Nakamura, whose engaging personality and gentle encouragement transformed the highly-decorated World War II combat veteran into a much beloved and influential art teacher for multiple generations of Whittier students, returned to Whittier High School on Sept. 7, when the District officially dedicated the school's art building in his honor.

The Whittier community, which included the Whittier Union Board of Trustees, Congressional representatives, City Council members, former students, and veterans from the U.S Armed Forces, gathered to honor the 98-year-old Nakamura, known to everyone as "Yosh," for his longtime career in education, which included 10 years as an art teacher at Whittier High School and nearly 30 years as an art teacher, dean, and vice president at Río Hondo College.

While a young family member joyfully played "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" from "The Lion King," Nakamura was praised by Whittier Union Board President Gary Mendez and Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo for his accomplishments, which include being a member of the legendary 442nd "Go For Broke" Regimental Combat Team.

"I want to thank everyone, especially the families who have assisted their students to be successful," Nakamura said during his speech. "I had the great privilege of working with so many talented people who created a good environment to support my teaching. At times I asked myself, 'I'm getting paid for this?' Whittier Union is a great place to work."

In his speech, Nakamura, decked out in Cardinal red, joked that after being hired, students "didn't run away" and in fact were attracted to his art class. This, Nakamura believes, led to more Asian-American teachers being hired in the District.

Nakamura also took time to praise his late wife, Grace Nakamura, a well-known community activist, and his three children, Linda, Joe, and Gary.

Nakamura taught at Whittier High from 1952 to 1963, when he left to take a position at Río Hondo College. Years later, a young Mendez would pop in on Nakamura, just to sit and listen.

Nakamura's empathy and patience had a profound effect on Mendez, who later became a student leader and served five consecutive terms as a Río Hondo Board member.

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"I think every student at Whittier Union should know Yosh's story," Mendez said. "As a teenager he was placed in an internment camp, but he fought back, became a war hero, and spent his entire life serving his community. In Whittier Union, Yosh's name will live forever."

One former student who came to support Nakamura was Ron Reeder, who was so inspired by Nakamura's personality and teaching style that he became an art instructor himself, teaching two- and three-dimensional art in Southern California for more than four decades, including more than 15 years at Río Hondo College, before retiring in 2022.

Reeder met Nakamura as a shaggy-haired Río Hondo College art student in the fall of 1966, the first semester that the College held classes at its Whittier campus. Reeder credits Nakamura for instilling passion, vitality, and humor in his lessons, allowing his students to pursue creative avenues of expression like Japanese ink drawings, known as sumi-e, which expanded the scope of their art projects.

"Yosh's lessons were challenging and entertaining and he made it possible for students to live, eat, and sleep art at all times," Reeder said. "Yosh's dedication to the arts, his school, and his community is inspiring to me."

After Nakamura spoke, the District unveiled a plaque, officially dedicating Whittier High's "Q" building, located on its south campus, as the Yoshio Nakamura Art Building. Nakamura also received certificates of achievement from State Senator Bob Archuleta and U.S. Representative Linda Sánchez.

"Yoshio Nakamura is a community treasure, a man who is revered as a teacher, mentor, artist, husband, father, and war hero," Oviedo said. "Whittier has been blessed by his presence and, with the dedication of the Nakamura Art Building, each new class of emerging artists at Whittier High will know and be inspired by his story."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

WUHSN_NAKAMURA1: Decked out in Cardinal red, former Whittier High School art teacher and World War II combat veteran Yoshio Nakamura speaks to a crowd of supporters gathered to see the school's art building dedicated in his honor on Sept. 7.

WUHSN_NAKAMURA2: Former Whittier High School art teacher Yoshio Nakamura is joined by Whittier Union Board members Irma Rodríguez Moisa (left), Gary Mendez (middle), and Jaime López (right) as they unveil a plaque officially dedicating and renaming the Whittier High School art building as the Yoshio Nakamura art building on Sept. 7.

WUHSN_NAKAMURA3: In a display of Cardinal pride, members of the Whittier High School's Associated Student Body join Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo on Sept. 7 to honor former Whittier High art teacher Yoshio Nakamura as he celebrates the dedication of the art building where he taught for more than 10 years.

OUR MISSION

The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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