

Celebrating Sakura 2025



Koto performance by Yukiko Vossen, accompanied by flutist LeeAnn McKenna, *left*.

For the first time in years, the Sakura Festival finally got its perfect spring day. The weather was warm, the cherry trees were bursting with fluffy pink blossoms, and not a single dark cloud dared to show up.

Drawn by sunshine and drifting petals, a large crowd of Clark students, employees, and community members of all ages filled the Japanese Friendship Garden. Beneath the canopy of blossoms, they celebrated spring, friendship, and hope, set to the graceful sounds of a traditional Koto performance by Yukiko Vossen, accompanied by flutist LeeAnn McKenna.

Clark College President Dr. Karin Edwards welcomed visitors and remarked that it was the first time in her five years at Clark that Sakura conditions had been perfect.

Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnergy-Ogle shared the history of Clark's cherry trees and remembered former Clark President Bob Knight and former Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard. Both men were instrumental in building the sister-city relationship with Joyo, Japan, and honoring that relationship every year in the Clark College cherry grove during Sakura. The mayor expressed sadness that both Knight and Pollard passed away recently, but their legacy will live on.

McEnergy-Ogle said, "We lost both Bob and Royce recently. And while we mourn the loss of two community champions, we celebrate their legacies in events and moments like today. And we can renew our commitment to carry forward the relationships and causes that blossomed under their stewardship."



Clark student Nicole Vara Madriz, *far right*, with members of the Clark College Japanese Club.

Consul General Ken Todorikiof the Japanese Embassy in Portland and Clark student Nicole Vara Madriz, who studied abroad in

Japan, also addressed the crowd.



Clark College Treble Ensemble performed under the direction of Dr. Jake Funk, *right*.

Dr. Edwards shared the history of Clark's Royce E. Pollard Japanese Friendship Garden and its significance to our college and the greater community. She also shared life lessons from Sakura.



President Dr. Karin Edwards welcomes visitors to the Sakura Festival.

Sakura's Life Lessons

1. Embrace Impermanence

A powerful reminder that nothing in life is permanent. When you accept impermanence, you learn to live more fully and appreciate what you have while it lasts.

2. Find Beauty in Simplicity

Cherry blossoms are not extravagant or overly complex. Their beauty lies in their simplicity. This teaches us that we don't need grand gestures or material possessions to experience joy.

3. Let Go with Grace

When cherry blossoms fall, they do so gracefully, creating a beautiful and peaceful scene. This is a lesson in letting go. Letting go doesn't mean giving up; it means trusting that something new and beautiful will emerge.

4. Celebrate New Beginnings

Cherry blossoms are often associated with spring, a season of renewal and rebirth. They remind us that after every ending comes a new beginning. No matter how difficult or dark a period may seem, there's always the promise of fresh starts and brighter days ahead.

After sharing these life's lessons, Dr. Edwards added, "Today, as we celebrate spring, the spirit of international friendship, and the spiritual significance of these cherry blossom trees, let us remember to practice mindfulness, simplify our lives, be grateful for small joys, and embrace change."

She thanked Clark's grounds crew for working hard to maintain the college campus. Then she added, "We're proud that Clark College can be a place of beauty and reflection for everyone in Vancouver. And I know that both Royce Pollard and Bob Knight would be proud of that legacy, too."

Next, Clark College Treble Ensemble, directed by Dr. Jacob Funk, performed songs including "Sakura," a traditional Japanese folk song depicting spring, the season of cherry blossoms.

Butterfly Garden



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Student Beheshta Eyalbi helped carefully collect the butterflies at the end. *Photo: Clark College/Susan Parrish*

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Once inside the net structure, visitors quietly interacted with 150 painted lady butterflies. Holding swabs soaked in nectar, visitors enticed the butterflies to perch and feed from their hands. Many of the visitors were young children, delighted in the up-close experience to marvel at these delicate, fluttering creatures.

In Japanese culture, butterflies carry rich symbolic meaning, frequently appearing in traditional art, literature, and

aesthetics. They often represent transformation, the beauty of nature, and the fleeting nature of life.

After the butterfly garden closed, ASCC student volunteers gently collected the butterflies. Beheshta Egbali, a member of Clark's Phi Theta Kappa honors society, cradled a butterfly in each hand, pausing to admire their bright orange wings before placing them in a mesh enclosure for transport.

Gaiser Student Center



Students from Child and Family Studies show off their artwork, wearing kimonos, as part of an annual learning activity during the cherry blossom season to learn more about Japanese culture.



A shortened version of the nostalgic traditional Japanese Dance "Fuji Musume" (Wisteria Maiden) was performed.



Takohachi drum group performed at the end of the festival.

When the outdoor portion of the ceremony concluded, hundreds of people moved indoors to Gaiser Student Center, where guests enjoyed many activities and presentations, including:

- Cherry blossom cookies made by students in Professional Baking & Pastry Arts
- Display tables included a tea ceremony, Ikebana (flower arranging), Japanese calligraphy, Japanese Club, and Kendo Club
- Video tribute to former Mayor Royce Pollard and former Clark President Bob Knight

Cultural Performances

- Video tribute to former Mayor Royce Pollard and former Clark President Bob Knight
- Haiku presented by the Japanese Club

- Nostalgic traditional Japanese Dance “Fuji Musume” (Wisteria Maiden)
- Adorable art shared by Clark College Child and Family Study’s, kimono-clad children
- Energetic show by Takohachi drum group

Did You Know...?

Tucked between the vibrant blooms and quiet pathways of Clark College, the Royce E. Pollard Japanese Friendship Garden is more than a scenic spot – it’s a living symbol of international friendship and local pride.



Royce E. Pollard Japanese Friendship Garden 2012.

- **Celebration of Friendship:**
Dedicated during the 2012 Sakura Festival, the garden honors former Vancouver mayor and Clark College trustee Royce E. Pollard, whose vision helped forge the sister city bond between Vancouver and Joyo, Japan. His legacy now blooms each spring in a sea of cherry blossoms.
- **A Landscape of Meaning:**
Every curve and stone in the garden tells a story. The winding path mirrors the mighty Columbia River, connecting people and places across our region. Sculpted earth mounds reflect the soft rise and fall of nearby hills, while a striking stone sculpture from Japan pays tribute to the mountains that define our skyline.
- **Roots of Generosity:**
The garden’s iconic cherry trees are two special gifts. In 1990, Mr. John Kageyama of America Kotobuki donated the first 100 Shirofugen cherry trees. Nearly three decades later, Mr. Tatsuo Ito of SEH America extended

that legacy with 200 Somei Yoshino trees, ensuring the blossoms will inspire generations to come.

More information

- Learn more about the history of our Sakura Festival [here](#).
- Read *The Columbian's* 2025 Sakura story [here](#).
- More photos can be viewed [here](https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjC9pui):
<https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjC9pui>
- The lifespan of a painted lady butterfly is 14 to 28 days. Learn 10 facts about painted lady butterflies [here](#).

Photos: Jenny Shadley/Clark College