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## **INTRODUCING THE 2018 GOODWILL AMBASSADORS**

**Washington, DC** [March 1, 2018] – For more than 20 years, the National Cherry Blossom Festival Goodwill Ambassador Program has selected more than 100 young men and women to promote cross-cultural friendships throughout the Festival and beyond. Most of those recruited currently study or have studied Japanese language and culture, in addition to participating in U.S.-Japan programs. These young men and women have a true passion for international relations and community involvement. Our Goodwill Ambassadors help create excitement while also welcoming, educating and engaging visitors of all ages, as cultural liaisons and official representatives of the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

**Sydney Fanoga** was born and raised in Hawaii and graduated from Punahou School before coming to the east coast to study at George Mason University. Sydney is majoring in Global Affairs with two concentrations, Asia and Media, Communication and Culture. During the summer of 2017, Sydney participated in a study abroad program in Akita, Japan. While at Mason, Sydney competed as a student athlete for the George Mason Women's Volleyball team until her final year as a student athlete came to a close this past fall. After graduation, Sydney plans to spend the summer traveling before attending graduate school in the fall.

**Renee Gao** is a freshman at Georgetown University, majoring in Japanese and Biochemistry. Studying Japanese for four years, she is not only interested in Japanese culture, but also the arts and the tradition. Through her experiences learning about Japanese digital media production and Kendo, she hopes to promote a deeper understanding of Japanese culture to the D.C. community. As a Goodwill Ambassador, she is excited to interact with this global community and strengthen the US-Japan connection.

**Anshu Jain** is a sophomore at the George Washington University, majoring in International Affairs and minoring in Japanese. He is half Japanese and half Indian, and was born and raised in Cupertino, California. Last summer, he went to Japan to visit family and learn more about his roots, due to his lifelong passion of exploring the Japanese language and culture. Anshu is excited to represent the Cherry Blossom Festival, allowing him to spread Japanese culture, while progressing towards his career in U.S.-Japan relations.

**Jason Martin** is a graduate from George Mason University, majoring in Global Affairs with a concentration in Asia. He has studied Japanese for two and a half years and has spent roughly six months in a study abroad program in Sophia University to better understand the language and culture. He aspires to participate in government services in order to strengthen the U.S.-Japan relationship.

**Misaki Murase** is a junior at Waseda University, School of International Liberal Studies in Tokyo and currently studying abroad at Georgetown University as a one-year exchange student, majoring in International Affairs. She was born in Nagoya, Japan, and has been going back and forth between United States and Japan. As a Japanese exchange student in D.C., she hopes to learn international relations by engaging with the D.C. community as a Goodwill Ambassador, and is honored to take part in promoting U.S.-Japan friendship through the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

**Audrey Zhou** is a freshman at Georgetown University, majoring in International Business. She has studied Japanese for four years and studied abroad in Akita Minami High School over the summer. Audrey has been involved with the planning and implementation of Japanese cultural events before but never on such a large scale. She hopes to use this opportunity to improve her Japanese language proficiency and deepen her understanding of Japanese culture while helping foster a better relationship between the U.S. and Japan.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is the nation's greatest springtime celebration. The 2018 Festival, March 20 – April 15, includes four weeks of events featuring diverse and creative programming promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty, and community spirit. Visit [nationalcherryblossomfestival.org](http://nationalcherryblossomfestival.org) or call 877.44.BLOOM for more information, or check out [Facebook](#) (CherryBlossomFestival), [Twitter](#) (@CherryBlossFest), and [Instagram](#) (@CherryBlossFest).

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