



# 2026 Goodwill Ambassadors Report



*Once a Goodwill Ambassador,  
always a Goodwill Ambassador!*

Compiled and edited by Carlos Alexei Márquez Arce

# NATIONAL *Cherry Blossom* FESTIVAL



## Goodwill Ambassador Program





## Goodwill Ambassador Program

The Goodwill Ambassador Program, coordinated by the National Cherry Blossom Festival, is one of the most highly regarded signature programs of the Festival combining aspects of education, culture, the arts and building community.



### WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR

Individuals passionate about international exchange and the National Cherry Blossom Festival who come together to:

- Represent the Festival at community and cultural events
- Foster U.S.-Japan friendship through engagement and exchange
- Share Japanese culture and language with wide range of audiences
- Lead interactive activities at events like the Blossom Kite Festival and Petalpalooza®

### ELIGIBILITY

- Current undergraduate or graduate students, or recent college graduates under 25
- Reside in the D.C. area (temporarily or permanently) from January - May 2027
- Interest in Japanese culture, arts, humanities, event management, or hospitality
- Knowledge of Japan or Japanese language preferred, but not required
- Strong connection to or appreciation for the D.C. community

**APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE MID-OCTOBER**

**FOR INQUIRIES CONTACT US AT  
[GOODWILLAMBASSADORS@NCBFDC.ORG](mailto:GOODWILLAMBASSADORS@NCBFDC.ORG)**

**LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE PROGRAM**



 [TINYURL.COM/NCBF-GWA](https://tinyurl.com/NCBF-GWA)



**Insights from  
the  
2026  
Goodwill  
Ambassadors**



## ABDULLAH ABDULAZIZ

### HOWARD UNIVERSITY, CLASS OF 2029

Participating as a Goodwill Ambassador for the National Cherry Blossom Festival has been one of the most meaningful experiences I've had this year. Through this program, I learned the importance of cultural exchange and how events like the festival bring people from different backgrounds together. Representing the festival helped me better understand the history behind the cherry blossoms and the strong relationship between the United States and Japan.

After completing a cultural exchange program in Japan last year, as well as participating in the Kizuna Across Cultures Global Classmates Summit, I knew I wanted to continue participating in this type of intercultural exchange. As a Goodwill Ambassador, I was able to promote those same ideas alongside my colleagues to the community, which I am very grateful for. Intercultural understanding begins with learning, and I am glad I was able to teach a little bit about U.S.-Japan relations to the community.

As a liaison for the festival, I had the opportunity to attend events, meet community leaders, and connect with other ambassadors who share similar interests. As a Supply Chain major, I was also able to network with business representatives in the U.S.-Japan space, learn about their journeys, and see how I can apply those insights to my own path.

Overall, this experience had a lasting impact both personally and professionally. It strengthened my understanding of cultural exchange and the importance of building meaningful connections across communities. The relationships I built and the events I attended gave me a deeper perspective on U.S.-Japan relations. Moving forward, I plan to apply what I learned by continuing to seek opportunities in global collaboration and intercultural engagement.





## **LUCY KNOEPFLMACHER**

### **AMERICAN UNIVERSITY & RITSUMEIKAN UNIVERSITY, CLASS OF 2025**

My time as a Goodwill Ambassador provided me with the opportunity to hone invaluable skills for both my professional and personal development. From interacting with foreign dignitaries and company executives to children and families from the DC community, every chance to represent the Festival and the gift of cherry blossoms was a gift in itself. I practiced networking, facilitating, leading, and collaborating with my fellow Ambassadors to build lasting connections and memories.

One moment that will stay with me for years to come was learning how to exchange business cards according to Japanese professional etiquette. Learning from our Program Coordinators and practicing with the other Goodwill

Ambassadors was both fun and useful, and was a beautiful display of the opportunities for intercultural exchange that the Goodwill Ambassador Program provides.

As someone interested in connecting my passion for intercultural exchange with making a positive social impact on both global and local scales, the Goodwill Ambassador Program demonstrated a way for me to make this connection in a meaningful and lasting way. My experiences connecting with both high-level professionals and grassroots-level community members will be relevant to my current position in the nonprofit sector and my career aspirations, which will undoubtedly require me to work with individuals from all walks of life. I am very grateful to have had this opportunity, and hope to stay engaged with the National Cherry Blossom Festival.





## ADENA MARIE NORWOOD

### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, CLASS OF 2027

Upon hearing I was selected to become a Goodwill Ambassador for the National Cherry Blossom Festival, I was honored to be chosen for the role, as my background only had a light Japanese influence. My father, a naval engineer, lived in Okinawa, Japan, for much of his childhood and raised my sister and I with international and Japanese values. Becoming a Goodwill Ambassador was a rare full-circle experience for me. I was in the children's choir featured in a past NCBF parade and was able to explore Japanese culture that so colored my father's upbringing.

I experienced many enlightening experiences during my time with the Goodwill Ambassador Program. I gained a sense of pride serving as a representative of the festival. Guests and locals began to recognize me over time and looked to me as an ambassador for more than the blossoms. I believe this is true Diplomacy. D.C. locals appreciated my public-facing presence and dedication to their city. At the same time, I had the responsibility of transforming my conduct and presence to suit professional diplomatic communities. Attending networking opportunities with the Japanese Ambassador during his evening reception and events like the Japanese Fair at the Kennedy Center taught me how to be dynamic like a practicing diplomat. The public relies on me to be an approachable leader, and the international community expects me to be a respectable representative of both my country and my own values. This opportunity not only connected me with professionals that I still keep in touch with, but also gave me a brief and thorough education in serving as a Foreign Service officer as a Diplomat after I graduate.



## **TOMOHIRO NOZAKI**

### **GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, CLASS OF 2026**

Serving as a 2026 National Cherry Blossom Festival Goodwill Ambassador has been one of the most meaningful and transformative experiences of my life. Through this role, I learned how powerful cultural exchange can be when it is rooted in kindness, service, and genuine human connection. One of my most memorable experiences was welcoming guests at the Opening Ceremony, where I had the opportunity to guide attendees, answer questions, and help create a warm atmosphere for visitors from many different backgrounds. Seeing the joy on people's faces reminded me that even small acts of service can make a lasting impact. Another unforgettable moment was helping lead activities at the Oxon Run Pinknic, where I witnessed how communities come together through art, music, storytelling, and shared celebration. These experiences taught me that diplomacy often begins in everyday interactions.

The experience that impacted me most deeply was participating in the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation Freedom Walk. I had the honor of speaking before veterans, community leaders, and guests while reflecting on the history of Japanese Americans during World War II and the importance of resilience, empathy, and trust. As someone who was born and raised in Mexico, later moved to the United States, and will soon continue my journey in Japan, this moment felt deeply personal.

Living across cultures has taught me the importance of listening, adapting, and building bridges between people. Standing at the memorial, I felt not only connected to history, but also responsible for helping carry its lessons forward for future generations.

This program strengthened my confidence in public speaking, leadership, networking, and cultural diplomacy, while also helping clarify my future aspirations in international affairs and service. It showed me how meaningful it can be to serve as a bridge between countries and communities. I am deeply grateful to the Festival staff, mentors, and my fellow Goodwill Ambassadors for their support, teamwork, and friendship throughout this journey. Being a Goodwill Ambassador was more than an honor, it was a gateway that showed me how powerful one person can be in bringing people together, and it inspired me to dedicate my future to making the world better through connection and understanding.





## LILY NGUYEN

### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, CLASS OF 2026

Serving as a Goodwill Ambassador for the National Cherry Blossom Festival reinforced for me the importance of giving people a sense of hope and connection. Throughout the festival, I engaged with individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, and I came to better understand how meaningful it is to create spaces where people feel welcomed and included. The cherry blossoms are a natural focal point, but what stood out most was how they brought people together: encouraging conversations, shared experiences, and a sense of collective appreciation beyond cultural and national differences.

This experience also contributed directly to my professional development. Through the program, I was able to build connections with individuals working in the U.S.-Japan space, while strengthening my ability to communicate across cultures in a public-facing role. Representing the festival required clarity, adaptability, and cultural awareness, skills that are directly relevant to my future career in international affairs and diplomacy. The opportunity to engage with both domestic and international audiences helped me better understand how to translate cultural and diplomatic significance into accessible, meaningful interactions. Looking ahead, I will carry forward both the relationships and the perspective gained through this program. The experience reinforced the importance of environmental stewardship and the need to care for shared natural spaces like the cherry blossoms. It also highlighted the value of enduring relationships, not only between nations, but between individuals, and the responsibility to continually renew and strengthen those connections over time.



# NATIONAL *Cherry Blossom* FESTIVAL



## **NATSUKI TAKIZAWA** **MCDANIEL COLLEGE, CLASS OF 2025**

Participating in the National Cherry Blossom Festival's Goodwill Ambassador Program deepened my understanding of cultural exchange as a form of diplomacy. While my previous experiences focused on cultural education and public engagement, this was my first opportunity to engage directly with the broader context of international relations. Through the program, I gained a clearer understanding of how the Festival functions not only as a celebration of culture, but also as a platform where the Japanese Embassy, sponsors, and community partners come together to foster and sustain strong relationships.

This experience highlighted the diplomatic and organizational dimensions of cultural exchange, where consistency, intentionality, and trust are essential in representing and maintaining relationships between nations.

One of the most meaningful aspects of this experience was seeing how the Festival connects with the local community through individual interactions. Through conversations with visitors at various events, I saw how even brief exchanges could contribute to a larger goal of fostering mutual understanding and goodwill—something that is, in itself, a form of diplomacy. Being part of this process allowed me to see my role not only as a communicator, but as someone contributing to a long-standing relationship between the two countries. This was especially meaningful given my personal connection to the Festival, and I will carry forward a deeper awareness of the role cultural initiatives play in international diplomacy, along with a stronger commitment to contributing to these efforts with thoughtfulness and intention.





## WIWIN SURYANI

### ST. OLAF COLLEGE, CLASS OF 2025

Participating in the Goodwill Ambassador Program for the National Cherry Blossom Festival highlighted for me the value of cultural understanding as a key practice of cultural diplomacy. As liaisons, we were regularly in the presence of diplomats and high-profile guests, and navigating those spaces pushed me to be more aware and intentional in how I engaged across cultural differences. During our visit to the Japanese Ambassador's Residence, I saw this firsthand. Through conversations with guests about the GWA Program, discussions about what it means to work in the foreign policy field, or even brief exchanges in Japanese, I saw tangibly how cultural understanding and communication form the foundation of relationship-building, both between individuals and across nations.

Another experience that stayed with me was during Petalpalooza and the Blossom Kite Festival, where the Goodwill Ambassador Program team hosted a Friendship Bracelets booth for the public. Again and again, we heard, "Thank you so much for doing this." I was struck by how such a small, simple activity could create moments of joy and bring people together. It taught me that intentionality and inclusivity go a long way in meaningful community engagement.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of the GWA Program, and for the lessons it has given me—lessons that I will continue to carry forward in both my personal and professional journey.

