

KAWABE MEMORIAL FUND

January 2022

Dear Student,

Thank you for your interest in the Kawabe Memorial Fund scholarship.

The Kawabe Memorial Fund was established in 1971 by the will of Harry S. Kawabe to support and promote general operations and programs of nonprofit agencies devoted to the care of low-income children, families and seniors in the Puget Sound area. The Fund also provides higher education scholarships to students graduating from Seward High School, as well as occasional capital project grants to churches or scholarships for training teachers, priests and ministers. ***Students planning to attend an Alaska vocational technical school are encouraged to apply.***

Eleven people serve on the Kawabe Memorial Fund Committee to direct the distribution of grants and scholarships from the Fund. A Scholarship Committee reviews scholarship applications from students and makes recommendations for awards to the broader committee. Scholarships are evaluated based on life aspirations including how students will contribute to the Seward community and their financial need.

Best wishes to you as you complete high school and pursue additional education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Abe', is written over a horizontal line.

Bruce T. Abe
Chair, Kawabe Memorial Fund Scholarship Committee

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Harry Sotaro Kawabe

Pioneer Businessman and Patriot
June 10, 1890 - November 7, 1969

The American dream began in 1915 for one hardworking, 25-year-old Japanese immigrant. The enterprising former farm boy, houseboy, and cook made his first fortune in Seward, Alaska. Drawn by the Alaska Railroad construction boom, Harry soon found opportunity in the humble work of washing laundry. Excellent work ethics brought him contracts with the Navy, Army, Alaska Railroad, steamship companies, hotels, hospitals, and even local bachelors and housewives.

The pennies per pound of dirty clothes added up. Soon the Seward Steam Laundry and Cleaners was the most modern laundry in Alaska, even offering pick-up and delivery with a new Ford car. In 1924, he moved to a larger building, where it remained the largest laundry in the Territory of Alaska until WW II.

A shrewd businessman, Harry Kawabe invested in real estate and a dozen Seward businesses including hotels, apartments, diners, bars, a hardware store, barbershop, gold mine, and the Kawabe Gift Store & Alaska Furs. Within 10 years of arriving in Seward, he was "one of the large property owners of the town," according to the 1925 Seward Daily Gateway.

Despite his record of achievements, federal anti-alien laws barred him from citizenship. Nevertheless, he succeeded in winning the right for Japanese residents to obtain licenses for fur purchase, hunting, fishing, and alcohol marketing.

His life in Seward ended abruptly when Japanese warplanes bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. While stoking the laundry boiler in the basement, Mr. Kawabe received the shocking news from an army officer that the U.S. Government now considered those of Japanese descent, including Japanese American citizens, enemy aliens. Rising racism against all Japanese, even such a respected business and community leader, required that he and his four Japanese laundry workers be spirited away to Anchorage in a freight train in the dark of midnight for their personal safety.

The next three years were spent behind bars and barbed wire under armed surveillance in remote concentration camps in Texas and New Mexico. In every internment camp, Mr. Kawabe was a leader and spokesman for the Japanese Americans.

After the war, Mr. Kawabe returned briefly to Seward and then moved to Seattle. There he invested wisely in real estate, and developed an import/export business featuring high quality Japanese art. He became a very successful businessman, financier, philanthropist, and a respected leader, spokesman, and advocate in the Seattle Japanese community.

After living under four successive U.S. flags, he became one of the first to obtain his U.S. citizenship when the Oriental Exclusion Act was repealed. "I am now a citizen of the United States of America and am proud of it, and I love my old country Japan." His life-long dream that he had worked so hard to achieve had finally come true. He would die many years later under the 5th U.S. flag at age 79.

The Emperor of Japan personally honored Mr. H.S. Kawabe with the rare Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1965 for his tireless efforts over the decades to promote friendly relations and mutual understanding between the United States and Japan.

Kawabe Memorial Fund

Through his will, Mr. Kawabe established a private philanthropic foundation to fund programs in the Seattle area for the needy: the young, the old, and the poor, and also to support local churches. Although Mr. Kawabe had little formal education, he combined his esteem of higher education with his love of Alaska and Seward. His philanthropy also includes scholarships awarded annually to deserving Seward High School graduates.