



# KEIZAI SILICON VALLEY

## US - JAPAN BUSINESS FORUM

*Newsletter – Issue No. 299 – January 2026*

### KRISTI YAMAGUCHI

Distinguished Achievement Award  
36th Anniversary Shinnenkai  
Friday, January 30th, 2026 5:30-9:30pm

Join us in celebrating Keizai Silicon Valley's 2026 Shinnenkai (New Year's Reception) on Friday, January 30, at the Palo Alto Hills Golf and Country Club. This year, we are honored to award Ms. Kristi Yamaguchi with the Keizai Silicon Valley Distinguished Achievement Award.



Ms. Kristi Yamaguchi is an Olympic gold medalist, a two-time World Champion and celebrated Hall of Famer in figure skating. She made history as the first Asian American woman to win an Olympic gold medal in the sport. During her career in figure skating, she worked with a nonprofit, Make-A-Wish Foundation, which inspired her to continue working with families and serve under-resourced children. In 1996, she founded Kristi Yamaguchi's Always Dream organization to support early literacy skills in children in Northern California and Hawai'i.

Ms. Yamaguchi will be giving an acceptance speech and participating in a fireside chat. Mrs. Yoky Matsuoka, Founder of Umi, CEO of Panasonic Well, and recipient of the Keizai SV Distinguished Achievement Award, will be the moderator.

We will also be performing our traditional Kagamibiraki (sake barrel opening) ceremony. The Deputy Consul General of Japan, Mr. Takeshi Ishihara is expected to lead this tradition.

## Friday, January 30, 2026

- Reception: 5:30 – 6:45 (PT)
- Program: 6:45 – 9:30 pm
- Venue close: 10 pm

## Venue

Palo Alto Hills Golf and Country Club  
3000 Aleix Dr  
Palo Alto, CA 94304

## Fees

- Early bird (until Friday, January 9th 11 pm PT): \$85
- Regular registration (until Friday, January 23rd 11 pm PT): \$135
- Late registration (until Wednesday, January 28th noon PT): \$175
- Walk-in: \$200

Dress code: Business casual. A buffet dinner will be served.



## Moderator

Yoky Matsuoka  
Founder, UMI. CEO, Panasonic Well.

# Always Dream

By Joe Quinlan

This year's Keizai honoree is Kristi Yamaguchi, who is well known for her successful performances both in ice skating and on *Dancing with the Stars*. But today her outstanding focus is on the Kristi Yamaguchi's Always



Dream organization, which is devoted to early childhood literacy. It is so admirable that she has chosen to focus on this area. Reading is an area where parents can have a tremendous effect on a child's development, and it is not that hard to do. Many of us older parents recall reading *Goodnight Moon* and other stories to our children. Later, we graduated to books like *The Magic School Bus* (with Ms. Frizzle), and our children would start to read pages with us, perhaps alternating by page. Finally, many of us encouraged our children to follow the popular book series like *Harry Potter* or Erin Hunter's *Warriors* and *Seekers*. Kristi herself is the best-selling author of the children's book *Dream Big, Little Pig*. Kristi Yamaguchi's Always Dream foundation shows that you don't have to be a tiger mom or dad to ensure a good education for your child; just experiencing the joy of literacy together is a great way to get your child on the path to success.

## 2025 Summer Networking in the Park

In 2025, for a change of pace, Keizai Silicon Valley moved its Summer Networking event from Serra Park in Sunnyvale to Rengstorff Park in Mountain View. But as with the prior year, delicious BBQ was provided by the Silicon Valley BBQ Association. The crowd enjoyed the traditional Bingo and Suika Wari, which have become staples of Keizai's summer picnic.



# Event Summary:

## Leveraging Intellectual Property in a Global & AI-Driven World

On Wednesday, October 16th, Keizai Silicon Valley hosted the forum “Leveraging Intellectual Property in a Global & AI-Driven World” which explored the fascinating intersection of IP and AI. Joining the forum as speakers from the legal field were David Hoppe of Gamma Law, Miku Mehta of Procopio, and Takayuki Ueda of Orange Inc. Mai Miyaoka of NEDO was the fifth panelist, and the event was organized and moderated by Keizai volunteer Sachi Sawamura.

Mai led off the presentation by explaining how something as simple as the shape of a Pocky snack can be patented. Interestingly, in Japan about 75% of patent applications are accepted, whereas in the US that number is about half. Miku followed up with a discussion of trademarks, explaining that even simple things like a series of musical notes can be trademarked. David then explained that many companies choose the path of trade secrets, since no filing is required and the information is safeguarded by contracts, policies and limited access. This has the advantage of not revealing the details publicly. Ueda-san explained that copyright is generally valid for 70 years from the author’s death or 95 years after publication, whichever comes first.

The panel then fielded some questions from Sachi. The panel generally recommended that early-stage companies develop an IP strategy as part of their business plan. It is important to have balance when deciding how many countries a company will apply for patents in; too few can leave a company vulnerable, but too many can be too consuming of time and resources. A key insight from the panel was that you have to be human to be an inventor. In other words, an AI program cannot be the inventor of a patent. One question the legal field will face in the future is how much a human needs to be involved in an invention for it to be considered invented by that person. For example, if the invention effort were 20% human and 80% AI, can the human still file a patent as the inventor? The courts are still figuring this out, so it will be an interesting topic in the coming years. Broadly speaking, Japan, the US and the EU try to harmonize their patent systems, so eventually they will likely gravitate toward a common understanding of how to handle AI as it relates to intellectual property.



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