

2025 Conference of New England Japan-based Nonprofits
Wyndham Newport Hotel, Rhode Island Sunday, October 26, 2025
PANEL #2 - SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND SOCIETIES PANEL

JASNE

Rob Dahlin enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1984 and retired as a Captain in 2020. While on active duty, Rob served in Japan three times for over nine years. Rob received Japanese training through Defense Language Institute-Washington and spoke intermediate-level



Japanese before his skills worsened. He is a civilian associate professor at the U.S. Naval War College and occasionally writes the Japan-America Maritime History Blog.

In December 2018, Rob created the Japan America Navy Friendship Association-Newport (JANAFAN-Newport) along with JMSDF Captain BITO Yuki. JANAFAN-Newport arranges on-base activities that focus on connecting military members and their families together to help them prepare for future assignments in Japan or to celebrate their previous time in Japan. In the fall of 2024, we decided to expand activities off-base and throughout the southern portion of New England and the group now does business as the Japan-America Society of Southern New England (JASNE) while still using the original name for the on-base activities.

WMFS

Gerry Rooney is a proud product of the Wilmington public schools with advanced degrees from UMass Amherst, UMass Dartmouth, the University of Rhode Island and the Famous Writer's school in Connecticut.



His 3 1/2 year journey around the world on bicycles and motor scooters, to 31 countries is perhaps his greatest accomplishment. Along the way, he became conversational in five different languages and wrote a book “hey brother” that gives insight to a life of friendship building

In 2001 he began to serve as President and CEO of the Whitfield-Manjiro Friendship Society Inc. continuing to build friendships from Southern New England to Japan and back again.

JSGH

It's my pleasure to introduce **Ms. Cydonie Brown** — a proud **U.S. Navy veteran** whose journey has carried her across oceans, cultures, and classrooms. Cydonie began her military service at **Misawa Air Base in Japan**, where she was stationed from **1989 to 1992**. It was there that she experienced her very first snowfall — and discovered just how cold a Japanese winter could be! Those early years abroad planted the seeds for a lifelong love of



travel, learning, and cultural exchange. After returning home, Cydonie earned an **Associate's Degree in Language Arts** from **Laney College** in Oakland, California, followed by a **Bachelor's Degree** from **San Francisco State University**. She went on to complete a **Master's in Public Administration** from **Capella University**, blending her passion for education and public service. Her career has taken her to some of the most inspiring corners of our country. She served as a **National Park Service Ranger**, working at **six different national parks** — including that “little hole in the ground” we all know as the **Grand Canyon**. She later became a **Lead Supervisor at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture**, where she helped share powerful stories of heritage, resilience, and pride. Cydonie also returned to Japan as an **English Conversation Instructor** in **Osaka** and **Yokohama**, continuing to bridge cultures through language and education. She was married to a Japanese national for twenty years and raised two incredible daughters — one now a **Mechanical Engineer**, and the other a **Chemist** — both fluent in English and Japanese. Today, Ms. Brown continues to serve her community right here in **Hartford**, working in a **Title I public school** where she supports students and helps them discover their own voices and dreams. Most recently, with the support of Principal **Ms. Rice**, she launched a brand-new **Japanese Cultural Club**. Her vision is to inspire students to learn about Japan's traditions and even attend one of Connecticut's largest summer *Matsuri* festivals, hosted by the **Japan Society of Greater Hartford**. Through every chapter of her journey — from the Navy to the National Parks, from Japan to Hartford — **Cydonie Brown has dedicated her life to service, learning, and connection.**

JSFC

Jackie Alexander is president of the Japan Society of Fairfield County for the last six years and chair of its Sakura Matsuri Festival the two years prior.

Jackie's career was in management consulting before turning to community work and raising her children. She actively volunteers for numerous local organizations and maintains strong ties to Princeton having served as Treasurer of the

Princeton Alumni Council, and over a dozen other roles. In 2015, she served on the steering committee for Princeton's Asian and Asian American Conference and has worked on efforts to support Japanese American studies at Princeton. Her interest in her own family history led her to assist with Japanese and Japanese American oral history projects.

Jackie's current hobby is studying Japanese arts through ikebana flower arranging and sumie brush painting.



MODERATOR

Born in California, Steve Aveson grew up right next to Japantown in San Francisco.

Working across five decades and traveling around the world as a journalist, his first visit to Japan was to Nagano for the 1998 Winter Olympics. His next visit came after moving

to work as a news anchor in Rhode Island. Beginning in 2002 he supported efforts to build friendship with the Japan America society of Rhode Island and that brought him and his wife Karen to Shimoda in 2018. In 2024 he was appointed by Tokyo to become the [Honorary Consul of Japan in Rhode Island](#)

