

4-18-2012

# Happy 100th!

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news\\_rls](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls)

---

## Recommended Citation

"Happy 100th!" (2012). *News Releases*. 677.  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news\\_rls/677](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/677)

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu).

# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Happy 100th!

**04.18.2012 | Hot Topics, Faculty, Culture and Society, Campus and Community**

Former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft often talks to elementary school students about his great-grandmother's legacy — the famous flowering cherry trees that grace the nation's capital.

This year, more than ever, he's been called upon to talk about the century-old, deeply symbolic history of these strikingly beautiful trees. Taft, a distinguished research associate in the University of Dayton's School of Education and Allied Professions, is participating in anniversary ceremonies around the region, where he's sharing some family stories and celebrating the blossoming number of Japanese-owned businesses in Ohio.

In 1912, President William Howard Taft and First Lady Helen "Nellie" Taft accepted 3,000 cherry trees from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo as a symbol of friendship between the two countries. The first lady and Viscountess Chinda, wife of the Japanese ambassador, planted the first two trees from Japan on the north bank of the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park on March 27, 1912.

"When Nellie Taft became first lady, she took an interest in making Washington, D.C. a far more beautiful place. It's hard to believe now, but the White House overlooked a swamp. She loved the idea of beautifying the area by the Potomac River," said Taft, who will participate in a cherry tree-planting ceremony at 11:30 a.m. on April 27 at the Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Columbus.

Columbus is among 38 American cities receiving a gift of cherry trees from Japan as part of the anniversary celebrations. Taft also will headline Sakura Matsuri, "Centennial Celebration of the Gift of the Trees," at 6 p.m. on May 3 at the Metropolitan Club in Covington, Ky. That commemoration is hosted by the Japan America Society of Greater Cincinnati.

It's hard to imagine a time in U.S. history when first ladies did not spearhead their own causes. Michelle Obama is fighting childhood obesity, while Laura Bush championed literacy. "Today we expect a first lady to take on a cause, but Nellie Taft was the first one to do so," Taft said. "She embraced the idea of beautifying Washington, D.C. That was an important part of her legacy. She was a remarkable, very energetic first lady."

President Taft sent flowering dogwood trees to Japan in 1915 to reciprocate the gift of the cherry trees. Today, the Taft family legacy remains strong.

"When I went to Japan as governor on my first trade mission, we took over some Ohio dogwood trees as a gift and planted them on the grounds of the Japanese parliament building," Taft said. "We also planted a Yoshino cherry tree on the grounds of the governor's residence in Columbus. The tree was a descendant from the original flowering cherry trees that came from Japan in 1912."

Last month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a new flowering cherry tree variety named for former First Lady Taft.

Countless poems have been written about cherry blossoms. The annual blossoming has become a rite of spring in Washington, D.C. For Taft, they will always symbolize his great-grandmother's legacy that now goes beyond beautification to economic development.

"With 500 Japanese companies in Ohio and major Ohio companies doing business in Japan, the cherry trees are more than just a symbol of friendship between Japan and the U.S.," Taft said. "They symbolize the growing economic ties between Japan and Ohio."

**To arrange media interviews with former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, contact Teri Rizvi or a member of the media relations staff at 937-229-3241.**