

NY CULTURE | APRIL 7, 2011

Reaching Out to the Arts to Help Earthquake Victims in Japan

By MELANIE GRAYCE WEST

In the hours following the March 11 earthquake in northeast Japan, the New York-based nonprofit Japan Society launched an earthquake relief fund.

Since then, donations to the fund have come in bit by bit from all corners of the city.



Drawn by Noli Novak

JOAN MIRVISS

Nahoko Sugiyama and Kashimi Asai, alumnae of Dance New Amsterdam, organized a benefit dance performance with other graduates on March 20. The organization donated the theater space and the technical crew donated their time. The dancers donated \$4,070 on Wednesday.

DJ Tadaaki Iwaki and pop-and-lock street dance performer Kenichi Ebina organized a performance and contributed \$3,398; a stoop sale and bake sale held by Japanese moms in Brooklyn raised \$3,800; a swing dance group organized by Japanese women held a "Swing for Japan" fund-raiser and contributed \$5,700 to the fund.

Parents and students from PS 59 Beekman Hill International near Japan Society's headquarters delivered money in person for the fund, and "a man from the Bronx organized an outdoor barbecue in the freezing cold and delivered over \$3,000,"

says Shannon Jowett, director of communications for Japan Society.

As of Wednesday, a little more than \$3.5 million has come in from over 11,700 donations. Among the thousands of donors is gallerist Joan Mirviss who specializes in Japanese art. With a personal gift and a percentage of profits from recent sales from her gallery, she's donated \$10,500 so far.

The disaster happened around the time of "Asia Week," a citywide collaboration of Asian art specialists, cultural institutions, galleries, museums and auction houses. Ms. Mirviss worked to get news of Japan Society's fund out to Asia Week participants and delivered fliers to auction houses and dealers.

An email blast to thousands of clients and personal contacts resulted in responses from strangers, a note from a high-school friend whom Ms. Mirviss hasn't seen in decades, and personal handwritten letters from Texas and Colorado. "They'd been searching for a way to participate and didn't know what the best way was and have thrown their support behind Japan Society," says Ms. Mirviss.

The emails and fliers "generated really gratifying responses across the board from all over the world, including my fairly senior parents, whose means are tight, but who immediately wrote a check," she says.

Grants from Japan Society's fund have gone to four Japan-based organizations that are focusing on distributing emergency goods, helping the elderly and the disabled, and an umbrella group that is distributing money to grass-roots organizations.

"The four charities to date that have been selected have been so carefully scrutinized and the due diligence was done. It's with great comfort that all of us are pledging our money," says Ms. Mirviss, adding, "Knowing that the money is going to get there sooner than anybody else's charity is really what's essential."