Former students
get degrees at last
By KYLE ODEGARD
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During a lunch before Oregon State University's graduation on Sunday, Jack Yoshihara showed off a huge ring commemorating the 1942 Rose Bowl, when his Beaver football team beat heavily favored Duke University 20-16.

For him, the piece of jewelry isn't strictly a symbol of victory.

The big game occurred weeks after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the Rose Bowl was moved from Pasadena, Calif. to Durham, N.C., because of fears of another attack. Yoshihara, who grew up in Portland, didn't play because the government considered him a security risk.

"They told me I couldn't travel more than 35 miles," he said.

Months later, in spring 1942, the 20-year-old sophomore was uprooted from Corvallis and sent to an internment camp.

He never resumed his studies. And like many others, he never talked much about his heartbreak.

"It was tough. ... I just forgot about it. It was such a sad phase for me," Yoshihara said.

On Sunday, Yoshihara finally got his degree from OSU, and he got a rousing ovation from the crowd at Reser Stadium.

The university's 139th annual commencement ceremony recognized 42 Japanese-American students removed from Corvallis during World War II, and honorary degrees were presented to 23 of them.

Only five attended in person. More than half of those recognized — OSU was only able to contact the families of 25 former students — are no longer living.

"The number of people who are able to be here is pretty sad. This should have happened earlier," said Andy Kiyuna, an OSU senior.

Kiyuna and fellow student Joel Fisher, who graduated with a political science degree on Sunday, lobbied state legislators to allow honorary degrees to be awarded to former students of many Oregon colleges and universities. A bill was sponsored in May 2007.

Fisher said remembering history could prevent something similar from happening in the future.

"As a nation, we lost sight of the fact that human rights must be guarded most vigorously in times of peril," said OSU President Ed Ray to the crowd at commencement.

Sunday was the first time 87-year-old Kay Nakagiri had returned to OSU since being kicked out. The Burbank, Calif., resident, who ended up getting his engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin, was curious to see how campus had changed.

http://gazettetimes.com/articles/2008/06/16/news/community/7aaloc01_grad.prt

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"I think I'm more emotional about it than my dad," said son Gary Nakagiri.

Mabel Takashima died seven years ago, but her four daughters were in Corvallis for the ceremony. The eldest, Carol Yasuda of Payette, Idaho, picked up her mother's honorary degree.

"She's smiling up there right now and saying, 'This is so neat;"" said daughter Doris Fraley of Denver.

Former OSU students Noboru Endow, Kay Kiyokawa and Jack Nomi also attended in person to receive their honorary degrees.