Tuesday, July 18, 2017 - ALSIP, Illinois – Bright skies and warm breezes provided the perfect setting today for the Ji Chin Sai or traditional Japanese Groundbreaking Ceremony to dedicate the property adjacent to GC America Inc.’s corporate headquarters at 3737 West 127th Street in Alsip for a major building expansion project that will enable the future growth of the company’s dental business.

The special Shinto ceremony was officiated by the Rev. Lawrence Koichi Barrish of the Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America and attended by GC Corporation Chairman Mr. Makoto Nakao and Mrs. Makiko Nakao, GC International AG Executive Vice President Mr. Henri Lenn, GC America President Steve Fletcher, Consul-General Naoki Ito of Japan in Chicago along with Illinois State Representative Al Riley, Dr. Gary Roberts, President of the American Dental Association, Alsip Mayor John Ryan and Hideyoshi Kajiyama, Senior Vice President of design-build firm KBD Group, which will serve as project partner with GC America and local municipal authorities through the projected completion of the company’s headquarters expansion in the summer of 2019.

The expansion project will enlarge GC America’s headquarters footprint on 127th from 90,000 square feet to 150,000 square feet, enabling the expansion for transplant manufacturing projects and, for the first time, the unification of GC America Associates at one consolidated Alsip location. The company expects to gain tremendous value from improving communication and innovation among Associates that can help drive dental and orthodontic business and product breakthroughs that improve and extend the lives of patients across the Americas.

Chairman Nakao expressed his sincere gratitude to the nearly 100 distinguished guests, including GC America Associates, for the time they committed to participate in the momentous occasion. He also shared that the new GC America headquarters, once completed, will establish a communication loop and creative space so the company’s Associates can more easily collaborate and innovate in order to fulfill the company’s cultural commitment to SEMUI, meaning to produce products that will serve dentists, dental professionals and orthodontists and their patients as their highest and best use, not merely for the sake of corporate profit.

Mr. Nakao told the special guests that the GC America headquarters building will be of a similar high quality design and construction as the company’s signature manufacturing, R&D and headquarters facilities in Japan and its European campus in Belgium. By the time it is completed, the company will be closer to achieving its Vision 2021 strategic objective to become the world’s #1 dental company in terms of its contributions to better oral health through innovative products, dental education programs and improving oral health around the world.

Rev. Barrish offered special prayers for the purification of the grounds surrounding GC America’s building expansion site in a traditional Shinto ritual ceremony including entreaties to the local “kami”, which are seen as guardians of the area, to commune their blessings and benefits with the people gathered at the purified site and to ask their spiritual protection of those individuals who will be involved in the construction of the new facilities as well as all those who will work in them and visit once the building project is completed. The Shinto priest, who traveled from the state of Washington to officiate, explained the inclusion of rice, salt water and sake in the ritual, the latter of which he mentioned was employed “to give any evil spirit a drink first before chasing him away so there are no hard feelings.”

GC International AG Executive Vice President Mr. Henri Lenn joined Mr. and Mrs. Nakao and other dignitaries in the ritual ceremony, partnering with Rev. Barrish to purify the grounds and prepare them for construction site work expected to begin in just a few weeks’ time. Mr. Lenn said the groundbreaking represented an exciting next step for the company as the global GC Group companies prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of GC Corporation in 2021.
GC America President Steve Fletcher thanked everyone in attendance and expressed his excitement for the ways in which the new headquarters facility will enable the expansion of manufacturing and training activities and for the first time enable the development of GC R&D innovations in the Americas. He said the new training center will be used on a daily basis to teach dental professionals and GC Associates, he also cited the company’s partnership with the University of Illinois Dental School as a key innovation driver. Mr. Fletcher said that as the dental industry in particular continues to grow and evolve, so, too, will GC America as it strives to spur innovation and new concepts for the betterment of patient treatment and longevity.

Illinois Rep. Al Riley then took podium to thank Mr. and Mrs. Nakao for their continued investment in the economic development of Chicago’s south suburbs. “It’s extremely important that you decided to stay here and expand in Alsip,” he said. “What you plan to do in this building—people should know what GC America is doing.” Rep. Riley said that GC America has been a fixture in the Village of Alsip and as a major business presence on the South Side since it combined with Coe Laboratories in 1990. “This company brings much to this community, and this building is an expression of love for the company’s Associates,” and, by extension, its customers and the patients they serve. The new building will create an exciting new climate in which GC America’s Associates can continue to serve the health needs of society.

Consul-General Naoki Ito of Japan in Chicago said the weather experienced during the ritual ceremony was absolutely perfect for the occasion, and he quickly cited a quote from legendary golfer Arnold Palmer to describe the work that will soon envelope the construction site. “The road to success is always under construction,” he said, citing Palmer. “Now, GC America is going down the fairway to the future.” The Consul-General noted that GC America is one of an increasing number of Japanese or Japanese-owned companies to make green field investments or to fund building expansion projects in the Chicagoland area and the wider American Midwest. “Please come to the Midwest,” he said, because here Japanese business leaders will find people with a similar work ethic, and “Illinois has the right environment to make great achievements [such as GC America’s 2014 achievement of the Deming Prize for Total Quality Management] more than possible.”

American Dental Association President Dr. Gary Roberts said that as a practicing dentist who used GC Corporation and GC America products for over 33 years, he had a special appreciation for the investment the company has made in making outstanding products and engaging with dentists and dental professionals to apply them for the good of their patients. “We are an industry to watch and we are ever growing,” he said, and, further, dental health is being seen as a major indicator of whole-body health, putting dental professionals at the forefront of today’s biggest and broadest discussions about the future of healthcare.

Alsip Mayor John Ryan said the consolidation of the company’s existing three Alsip locations into just one building in 2020 will really help the company achieve better efficiency and communication. He also mentioned that the facilities proximity to major interstate expressways, rail lines and downtown Chicago will continue to help the company attract world-class talent to enable its future growth. He also pledged to work collaboratively with the company to expedite the construction process and pledged the support of the village’s police and fire resources whenever called upon to ensure the construction site is safe and the project carefully and safely coordinated with local officials. “I’m really excited to be here and happy for the company,” the mayor said.

Hideyoshi Kajiyama of KBD Group, design-builder for the expansion project, which has worked to construct a number of GC facilities around the world, said his firm is excited to work with its partners at GC Corporation, GC America, the Village of Alsip and other municipal authorities to bring the project to a successful finish on-time and on-budget by the summer of 2019.

Following the ceremony, which was emceed by Director of GC America Operations Mr. Bora Sar, the guests joined Mr. and Mrs. Nakao and company officials for photos on the construction site and engaged in many varied conversations about the company, its products, people and plans for future growth to enable a century of health for people around the world. The invited guests were invited to join the company’s Associates for lunch and each was provided a keepsake shovel-shaped keychain commemorating the groundbreaking and asking their continued support for the project as it begins to take shape and helps frame the future growth of GC America Inc.
The groundbreaking event was punctuated by a program recognizing a new program initiated between University Of Illinois at Chicago, College of Dentistry (UIC) and GC America. For many years we have had a number of projects between the two organizations. We have now gone a step farther and created with UIC the “Kiyoshi Nakao Fund for Aging Population Studies.” The Fund honors Kiyoshi Nakao, one of the founders of GC Corporation and the grandfather of Mr. Nakao. This program truly reflects our company philosophy of “Semui” and Corporate Social Responsibility. The three-year renewable agreement will provide funding for laboratory and clinical studies on dental materials and techniques in the aging population. In addition, the funds will be used to provide opportunities to educate faculty, students, dental professionals and GC Associates on treating this section of the population. Collaboration between GC R&D leaders and UIC can lead to the development of new products. Outreach programs can also be supported with these funds bringing dentistry to the aging population. We look forward to seeing the exciting results born from this exciting partnership for our customers and end-users!