

NATIONAL

.....
APIA Initiative gives recommendations to President Obama • P3



HEALTH

.....
Men join against domestic violence at the Capitol • P7



THEATER

.....
Michelle Liu Coughlin and Vishal Vaidya in Barrio Grrrl! • P12



Asian American Press

Volume XXX: No.11

“BUILDING COMMUNITY WITHIN DIVERSITY”

WEEK OF MARCH 18 • 2011

www.aapress.com

Asian Pacific American Day at the Minnesota State Capitol

AAP staff report

ST. PAUL, Minn. (March 14, 2011) – The State Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans held its annual Day at the Capitol event Monday, giving organization leaders a chance to present their legislative priorities and for the community to learn about advocacy training and a chance to meet their elected representatives.

Organizers stated that this session and the volatile events of contemporary politics around the nation and the world demonstrate why building relationships and coalitions including elected officials is so important. With a state budget deficit of \$5 billion and 60 new legislators, communicating with those who will be making the



Participants of APA Day at the Capitol listen to speeches in the Rotunda on Monday. (AAP staff photos by Tom LaVenture)

decisions at the Legislature is critical to promoting the well-being of the Asian Pacific community.

The event presented two “Advocacy Training 101”

sessions where CAPM Executive Director Ilean Her and others taught people effective tools to making their voice heard at the capitol.

A forum followed in the Rotunda with elected officials speaking to include State Senators’ John Marty (D54), Sandy Pappas (D65) and Ellen Anderson (D66); along with State Reps’ Paul Thissen (63A); Rena Moran (65A); and Joe Mullery (58A).

Community leaders and non-profit organizations present included: Cultural Society of Filipino-Americans; Chinese Social Service Center; Neighborhood House; Asian Women United of Minnesota; Hmong American Partnership; Asian Women United of Minnesota; Korean Service Center and Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota.

Policy analyst David Zander and office manager Jovita Bjoraker have both retired and office support staffer Marc Mersky has moved on.

Executive Director Ilean Her is now joined by Brian Kao as the new research analyst, assisting with legislative affairs and conducting research

to support the Council’s legislative positions.

Kao is studying for his Masters in Public Policy at the University of St. Thomas. The Taiwanese American moved to Minnesota with his family from Tulsa, Oklahoma in early 1990s.

Pa Chia Yang is the new office manager and will oversee general office affairs and serve as the first point of contact for the Council.

Yang was born in Thailand and moved to America with her family at just three-months old. She has lived in Lansing, Michigan and Minnesota and graduated from Central High School.

In addition to her part time CAPM job, Yang is a part time sophomore studying social work at Metro State University. She is also a full time mother to a two year old daughter, Makayla. Her spouse Meng Xiong is currently studying law enforcement.



High school students, Melinda Yang, White Bear Lake; Nhia Yang and Pakou Vang, Patrick Henry; and Danny Cheng, talk about the importance of student activism and bringing an informed youth voice to the issues during APIA Day at the Capitol.

The two live in Oakdale.

Saymoukda Vongsay is the Cultural Coordinator and will oversee funding from the 2008 Legacy Act to benefit Asian Pacific cultural initiatives in the state.

There are also new staff interns that have helped beef up the electronic presence of the Council, with a new blog site. CAPM compiled a list

of current concerns for the Asian Pacific community. They include the current \$5 billion legislative budget deficit which is about one-eighth of the total budget expenditure of \$39 billion. The legislature has proposed an “all-cuts” budget while Gov. Dayton has proposed

CAPM

Continued on Page 9



CAPM staff and interns from left, Ilean Her executive director; Brian Kao, research analyst; Pa Chia Yang, office manager; Souvan Lee, UM intern; Sandy Kwan, UM intern; Tine Wu, U St. Thomas intern; Saymoukda Vongsay, cultural coordinator; and Amina Kuniyoshi, UM intern who recently returned to Japan to be with family until they locate a sister missing from the earthquake and tsunami.

Marilyn Tam at General Mills Asian/South Asian event



General Mills Asian Heritage Network and South Asian American Network members, from left: Shining Zhang, Ken Charles, vice president of Diversity and Inclusion, Hyun Mee Graves, Alyssa Buckalew, Serena Yue, Cheryl D’Cunha, Vikram Ghosh, Prerna Maheshwari, and Chinthu Udayarajan.

By TOM LAVENTURE
AAP staff writer

GOLDEN VALLEY, Minn. (February 18, 2011) – Asian and Pacific Islander employees of General Mills came from around the country last month to attend Asian Leadership Day at the company headquarters in Minneapolis.

The first Asian Leadership Day was held in 2008, and the event has now grown to include a two-day schedule and broad program. More than 200 employees, members of either the General Mills Asian Heritage Network or its South Asian American Network, collaborated on the event that included the presence of company officials and an address from Ken Powell, president and CEO.

Prerna Maheshwari, a chemical engineer in the Research and Development Division, chair of the South Asian American Network, and event vice-chair, said the conference is a major annual event in collaboration with the Asian Heritage Network. With more than 200 Asian Network members and



Marilyn Tam delivers her keynote address at Asian Leadership Day at General Mills headquarters. (AAP staff photos by Tom LaVenture)

about 150 in the South Asian Network, Maheshwari said it is important to have distinct organization or risk diluting the purpose of the mission and programs.

“General Mills is one of the few companies in the Twin Cities area that has a separate South Asian network and an Asian network,” said Maheshwari. “I think there are cultural nuances that are different enough

that present ourselves.”

The Keynote Address was given by Marilyn Tam, whose Fortune 500 past includes positions as CEO of Aveda, president of Reebok Apparel & Retail Group, vice president of Nike, Britannia Sportswear and Miller’s Outpost.

Tam is now director of

GENERAL MILLS
Continued on Page 9

Kristi Yamaguchi releases her children’s book at MOA

AAP staff report

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (Marh 12, 2011) – Kristi Yamaguchi was at the Mall of America Saturday to sign copies of her new children’s book, “Dream Big, Little Pig!”

Yamaguchi has had much written about her, including biographies and sports encyclopedic works on great women in sports; and once contributed to a technical skating book, “Figure Skating for Dummies” published in 1997.

“Dream Big, Little Pig!” is Yamaguchi’s debut picture book for children and young adults. Designed to inspire children of all ages to dream big, the story centers on ‘Poppy’, a young waddling piglet who has big dreams of becoming a figure skater. Poppy was not graceful. In fact, she proved quite clumsy in trying out her skates.

Poppy discovers that it takes a lot of persistence, hard work and belief in her self to be a star of the rink. Through the discouragement and teasing she learns that it



Kristi Yamaguchi poses for a photo with Mark Hughes of Shoreview at the Mall of America, Saturday, where the retired skating champion was signing copies of her new children’s book, “Dream Big, Little Pig!” Hughes, confined to a wheelchair, could not climb the stairs to the stage. When Yamaguchi learned of the dilemma, despite the long line the former Make A Wish Foundation honorary chair came off the stage without hesitation. (Contributed photo by Bob San)

helps to have big fans in her corner, like her grandparents and best friend, Emma, who is always there for her.

The book from Sourcebooks Jabberwocky publishers (www.sourcebooks.com) comes to life with the help of award illustrator Tim Bowers, who

with his love for animals, including childhood pet pig named Porky, went on to create artwork for several children’s books.

The signing was set up on a stage at the

YAMAGUCHI
Continued on Page 9

Us Foundation, a global non-profit organization devoted to youth issues, education, environmental issues and conditions for peace. She is also a consultant and motivational speaker on leadership, diversity, globalization, change management, and the integration of social and environmental concerns into business profitability.

Tam comes from humble beginnings as the second daughter of a traditional hong Kong family who worked her way from factories to America and graduated from Oregon State University with an MS in Economics. She started as a clerk in a department store and overcame "glass ceilings and glass walls" by learning how to achieve the best for the company with long range vision.

She began an extraordinary climb up the corporate executive ranks of the international business world and has since become an influential corporate leader, speaker, corporate consultant, author and respected humanitarian. She has several honors and an honorary doctorate from Old Dominion University.

Tam scanned the crowd and said the mostly "1, 2, 3 generation" immigrants share something in common – that someone had decided to leave home and start a new life in America, which takes courage, fortitude and faith.

"That is the biggest, scariest thing you could ever do," she added.

She said that by speaking another language at home the immigrant has an additional strength with multiple influences about how they think and perceive



Lordia Fok, standing left, a General Mills employee and member of the Asian Heritage Network Advisory Board, has a copy of *How To Use What You've Got to Get What You Want*, signed by the author and guest presenter, Marilyn Tam at Asian Leadership Day.

the world. This is no small matter when you consider many language translations can be almost the reverse of what is said in English – particularly with Chinese.

"Multilingual people are sometimes embarrassed by their own culture and want to forget all about what they are in desperation to belong – when it is from this authentic self that is where we grow and advance."

She went on to discuss cultural reference points including time, gender and other factors that impact how we work together in groups. When we are self-aware and aware of the background of others in the team then this is a useful knowledge base that makes it a more production process by knowing how to moderate presentation styles.

"Not everyone wants to get to the bottom line at that moment, but some do," she said.

She talked about mission in terms of company and individual. If your work is fulfilling your life purpose then you are better committed to participating

and contributing to the company mission.

Tam connected with employees on the common challenges of the workplace. She talked about overcoming the reluctance to speak out in meetings and presentations. Some people feel that meetings are a waste of time, and that they would rather be working. She said it is important to have a sense of dynamics so that ideas can connect and grow.

Culturally, this will require an atmosphere where all members feel able to defend a position to others and in situations where there is disagreement or competing ideas.

Maheshwari said Tam resonated with the group with valuable life lessons to anyone even if they are not Asian. There were other event speakers but she said Tam's background and what she accomplished resonated with anyone.

"She just had some really good general advice for the audience and I took some really good notes," she added. "The thing I liked the best were the

action plans. She had things that you can take back to your own life and actually use. Oftentimes you hear the inspirational speakers and you just don't know how to apply it.

General Mills has seven employee networks, which also include the American Indian Council, the Hispanic Network, Betty's Family (for GLBT employees), the Black Champions Network, and the Middle East/North African network.

Asian Heritage Network President Alyssa Buckalew noted that the event is about building personal relationships and becoming leaders. They have networked with the longer established Black Champions and Hispanic Networks and they invited leaders from each to their events.

"We are newer and I think events like this help us to become more of a community and for others to see that as well," said Buckalew.

Ken Charles vice president of Diversity and Inclusion, said Tam comes from a very authentic place. He said her personal journey through child labor and immigrating to the United States gave people the reason to believe that she has been there before achieving such great heights.

"The successes that she's had in corporate America and philanthropy gave her the voice of somebody who okay who's done it," said Charles. "She shared the wisdom of that journey and gave people the tools that they could use so they could be more effective."

Charles said the key message he took from the talk was that by being open to the universe, by opening your arms wide to those that are around you and then

ultimately giving to others, is a model that I think everyone can aspire to and really create value from."

Charles said that as a global company General Mills wants an environment where they recruit, retain and develop talent representing the various perspectives of society and the world. The challenge, he added, is to ensure that once great people are in place that they continue to feel included and valued so they will stay with the company for the long haul.

"From that we get great folks that make a contribution to the organization, great ideas that drive the business forward and great insights that allow us to connect with communities and customers in a new way," said Charles.

He said it's important to ensure people are valued for performance and merits and not the color of their skin or their economic origins, but to work there needs to be a business rationale that recognizes the company does business in all communities and that these consumers bring great ideas and capabilities to the organization.

"It really is a virtuous cycle," he added. "At the end of the day the proof is in the pudding – so when people see the value that folks bring to the organization it's very easy for them to appreciate and to understand."

He said that the demographics of the nation is changing and so it's no longer a matter of choice about whether people believe it's the right way to think or not. It is also a matter of globalization and embracing new realities to be an effective business in the future.

The Midwest presents

a unique scenario where the building blocks need to be put in place to ensure people that may have not experienced people of other cultures or backgrounds than their own will understand and appreciate the differences. The cultural days and workshops events increase the comfortable level by getting people to know each other and they learn about one another.

"Every one of us has something different about us, whether it's from our experience, whether it's from our culture, whether it's a physical capability – there is something unique about each of us," he added. "We look at the world a certain way because of the experience that we have."

Charles said once the foundation of mutual value is reached then it is easier to get to a place where people need to value the uniqueness of others as much as their own. It's about getting over the sense of 'my way is the right way and your way is wrong' in a more natural and holistic approach.

"It's a journey and you have to focus on the organization," he added. "So diversity inclusion training, great management training, these cultural events, they help the environment – but you have to also focus on the individual, and not just the people of color, but everyone in the organization so that they understand how important this uniqueness is and how to value it in themselves and other people."

When leadership follows this commitment then he said it is real and sincere.

"If you do both of those pieces then you create an environment where good things start to happen," he added. □