



The Best and Brightest Celebrate the Ninth Annual Asian Heritage Awards

In what Congressman and San Diego Mayoral candidate Bob Filner called the “biggest and the most glamorous event for the Asian community in San Diego,” almost 500 guests came together to honor California Controller John Chiang, UCSD hepatitis pioneer Dr. Robert Gish and 14 others for their individual achievements during the Ninth Annual Asian Heritage Awards on Sept. 15.

The gala ceremony was held at the San Diego Marriott Marquis and Marina on Harbor Drive, which also played host the next morning for the first ever community forum to help young people prepare for important technological and global changes that lie ahead.

The gala evening event sparked with enthusiasm and some new touches. During the reception, students from Montgomery Middle School demonstrated their science projects while noted calligrapher Zhou Bin demonstrated his craft. During the ceremony, with Dr. Lilly Cheng of the Confucius Institute emceeing, Zhou produced three messages on silk entitled “Harmony,” “Prosperity” and “Energy.” All were auctioned off. Guests were also treated to performances by the Kealohilani Dance Group, the One Dream Choir and the XingJian Dance Studio. Emcees were Marcella Lee of Channel 8 and author Manna Ko.

Dr. Binh Tran summed it up best when she said, “I have never seen such an outpouring of thoughts and feelings for community involvement and global change. Together, we have planted the seeds for a successful year ahead.”

(For full photo coverage of the Ninth Annual Asian Heritage Awards, go to the link below.)

<https://plus.google.com/photos/116077980910219652905/albums/5791967009172309425>

Rosalynn Carmen, president of the Asian Heritage Society, emphasized how the gala ceremony and the community forum the next day were a perfect example of a community working together on several levels. In addition to a strong planning committee of community leaders, including past Asian Heritage Awards honorees, the awards and breakfast forum had the support of the government in the U.S. Navy, business leaders such as SDG&E, Time Warner Cable and Barona Resort and Casino, academic leaders in Alliant International University, Cal State San Marcos and UCSD, and officials from both sides of the political spectrum, including Congressional Representatives Democrats Bob Filner and Susan Davis, and Republicans Duncan Hunter and Brian Bilbray.

During the evening awards ceremony, keynote speaker Navy Rear Admiral Peter Gumataotao told guests: “We must build a path for the generation that is following us. We must inspire them. We, as leaders, must continue to inspire with actions, not just words.”

Indeed, all recipients of this year’s awards had no problem inspiring a special selection committee from choosing them as 2012 Honorees.

Winners included TIE South Coast, business enterprise; Wendy Urushima-Conn, president of the Asian Business Association of San Diego, entrepreneurship; Michael Vu, assistant registrar of voters for San Diego County, government; Dr. Helen Chen, vice president of Ambryx Biotechnology, innovation and technology; Edward Park, principal of Barnard Elementary School, education; Audie deCastro, legal affairs; Dr. Grace Kuo, associate dean UCSD School of Pharmacy, health and medicine; Michael Chen, Channel 10, media and film; Akiko Bourland, president of the Ohara Ikebana Society, art and literature; Thanom Sterritt, cultural preservation; Seema Sueko (who was not present), performing arts; Air Force Colonel Mylene Huynh, military service; the Tzu Chi Foundation, humanitarian outreach; and the Taiwanese American Foundation of San Diego, community service.

In addition, California Controller John Chiang was honored as this year’s Special Recognition recipient. Chiang had been the keynote speaker at the Second Annual Asian Heritage Award in 2005.

In presenting the award to Chiang, Tom Hom, former San Diego Councilman and California Assemblyman, called him “the most respected elected official in Sacramento today, regardless of party affiliation. His vigilant efforts in bringing to light fraud, bribes and criminally misleading record keeping by a number of California cities has made him the most effective state controller in California history.”

Noted hepatologist Dr. Robert Gish received the Society’s Diversity Pioneer Award, presented for the second time, for his work in raising awareness about hepatitis B. In announcing the award, Presidential Medal of Science winner Dr. Shu Chien said Dr. Gish “has long been recognized in Southeast Asia as the pioneer who created the road map to define and deter the advance of this dread disease.”

In his remarks Gumataotao also emphasized “the critical need” for the Navy to partner with organizations like the Asian Heritage Society to ensure the next generation of sailors and officers are prepared for future technological challenges.”

To that end, the Society also hosted a breakfast gathering the next morning on the future of education and how to best serve this generation of young people through programs emphasizing STEM (science, technology, engineering and math.) More than 100 students, teachers and parents attended the gathering, also at the San Diego Marriott Marquis and Marina.

“If children are not engaged by middle school in STEM education, by high school their chances of joining (the Navy) decrease because the Navy is actively seeking STEM professionals,” said Capt. Elizabeth Gracia. “They aren’t prepared to pursue a technical career, and they subsequently are not prepared for a Navy career.”

Gracia was joined by a distinguished panel who explored a wide range of topics, including the importance of understanding differences between cultures and whether corporations should provide input in developing lower school curricula. A full report of the event in video format will be available.

Other panelists were Congressman Filner, Pedro Villegas of SDG&E, Susan Yonezawa of the UCSD Center for Research in Educational Equity; Larry Bock, creator of the USA Science and Engineering Festival; Navy Capt. Cynthia Macri, Dr. Tarun Bhatia, vice president of Alliant International University, Dr. Estela Matriano, Alliant professor of education; Dr. Lilly Cheng, founder of the Confucius Institute; Sarah Villareal, associate dean of Cal State San Marcos, and Bernie Rhinerson, chief of staff for the San Diego Unified School District.

How to prepare our children for future was also at the heart of a special audiovisual presentation and brief address the night before by Rosalynn Carmen, president of the Asian Heritage Society and founder of the Asian Heritage Awards.

“Like me, you might be wondering with things changing so fast, how do we keep up and how are our children going to keep up,” said Carmen, who shared the basis for the Society’s BOOST-STEM program designed to prepare young Asian and Hispanic underserved females for careers and advancement in the fields of business, science and technology. “I would make it as simple as ABC,” said Carmen. “But instead of starting with A, I would start with B – Business. More than making money, I would teach them the essence of business, the attitude of risk-taking, self-reliance, being a self-starter, leadership, being strategic and knowing the value of teamwork.” Carmen went on to amplify the other components of the BOOST program – Opportunity, Organized Global Education, Science and Technology.

Afterwards, Asian Heritage Society co-founder Leonard Novarro awarded the first scholarships to students who distinguished themselves during the BOOST-STEM program that was launched in June at Montgomery Middle School. The scholarships, in the name of Dennis Avery, a longtime supporter of the Asian Heritage Awards, was awarded to middle school students Sarah Nguyen and Hieu Hoang. Montgomery principal Jonathan Ton also accepted an honorary stipend to be shared by four other students from the program.

The BOOST-STEM program will host a series of workshops next year with academic partners Alliant International University and Cal State San Marcos, supported by the U.S. Navy, SDG&E, Time Warner Cable and Barona Resort and Casino.