



# Asian Pacific Islander Organization

Jan.-April, 2012

## It's TIME TO RENEW YOUR APIO MEMBERSHIP

Now that a year calendar year is upon us, it's time to renew our dues in our organization. A 2012 application form is available on the APIO Web site: <http://www.apio.org/forms.htm>

If paying your dues every year is a hassle, consider becoming a lifetime member. Three payments of \$100 or one \$250 payment makes you a member of APIO forever -- and gains our eternal thanks for your support.

## President's Message

Words cannot express how excited I am to be the Executive President for the Asian Pacific Islander Organization. As most of you know, I am not new to the Agency, however I am younger than the age Hugh Hammond Bennet would be if he were still with us today.

I am very proud to say that I am from a family with very strong roots in conservation. In fact, I have a sister who is with the USDA Forest Service, a brother who is a retired NRCS state administrative officer, and my wife, Linda, and I are very proud of our son who is an NRCS Range Management Specialist.

After formally assuming my leadership role in October, APIO thanked outgoing President Peter Bautista and his successful team and then welcomed the new leadership via VTC. This was the first organizational training meeting to be held with this technology. My thanks to Chief Dave White who opened up the VTC and to all the members and supporters who made this a success.

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## NEW MEXICO HOSTS SECOND ANNUAL DIVERSITY DAY

— article and photos by Triston Lovato,  
Earth Team Volunteer, NM Public Affairs

— submitted by Jean Foster, SEPM, New Mexico

Vibrant costumes, traditional dances, intriguing stories, and a delicious variety of food—these were all present at NRCS New Mexico's second annual Diversity Day event, held in June 2011.

The event welcomed speakers from various backgrounds who had many interesting experiences and information to share. First up was James Sperry, an NRCS District Conservationist from Silvercliff, Colorado. Sperry spoke on the experiences and challenges he faced after losing his leg to bone cancer at age 12. Sperry said he was encouraged by his grandfather to adapt to the circumstances and was able to overcome the challenges posed by his disability, even working out in the field and on the family ranch.

Next, two speakers discussed immigration and assimilation to New Mexico. Rick Hendricks, PhD and State Historian from Santa Fe, shared the history of

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APIO continues to be a leader through the establishment of an organizational mentoring program, cooperating with the NRCS National Mentoring Program, and being the first to remotely deliver mentoring training via webinar. We are now working at providing opportunities to provide translation services to assist in the delivery of agency programs and services.

So, what is the organizational vision for the new president and organizational leadership team? We will focus on building leaders, creating new partnership opportunities, and assisting with building a diverse workforce and a cultural change.

I remember many years ago, my brother told me that I needed to join APIO, that I would learn a lot about leadership and importance of diversity, that I would gain new friends and a network of talented individuals from across this great nation and beyond. Well, this little brother will be the first to admit that his older brother was right ... join APIO and become a member of our dream team!

*Jay*

Anglo immigration to NM. Monika Ghattas delivered a presentation about Syrian and Lebanese immigration to the state. Both speakers shed some light on non-Hispanic immigration to the Land of Enchantment.

Members of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) were also present to talk about their experiences and provide a brief explanation of PFLAG and what the organization does. Katherine Palmer, State Coordinator for the New Mexico chapter of PFLAG, shared her personal experience and offered assistance to anyone looking to begin a chapter of PFLAG in their local community. Jean Genasci, a mother, long-time member of PFLAG, and advocate for equal rights, spoke about her personal experience of having a gay son and how that led her to become involved with PFLAG.

Also at the festivities were the Aztec Danzantes dancers. Complete in traditional wear and headdress, they danced and played music for NRCS onlookers, and the fun did not stop there.

The celebration would not be complete without something good to eat. There was a potluck with a variety of ethnic and cultural foods, along with a salsa contest. The winner of the contest was Pearl Armijo, District Conservationist from Los Lunas. She took home a gift certificate to Sadie's and bragging rights!



# CHINESE NEW YEAR 2012

## YEAR OF THE DRAGON

In 2012, the Chinese New Year will start on January 23. Since ancient times, the Chinese New Year was considered as the time to honor ancestors and heavenly deities. In addition, it was the time to organize family gatherings and grand feasts.

Chinese New Year is observed for two consecutive weeks, and is popularly known as Spring Festival. It usually starts from late January and early February. The variation in the date of festival is due to the changes in the track of the new moon.

The celebration starts on Jan. 22 on New Year's Eve, and ends on Feb. 6 with the Lantern Festival. Lighting of colorful lanterns in the houses and eating of traditional rice preparation are the main rituals of this day. The day is also marked by traditional folk songs, dance and lantern shows. No matter what the festivities or rituals are followed, the core message that the Chinese New Year festival carries is that of peace, prosperity, happiness and brotherhood.

2012 marks the 4710th Chinese New Year, and is the Year of Dragon. The dragon is the 5th sign of the Chinese zodiac and it is regarded as an auspicious symbol which stands for power, good luck, success, and happiness.

You are a Dragon if you were born in 1928, 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, or 2000.

Dragons tend to be popular individuals who are always full of life and enthusiasm, with a reputation for being fun-loving and a "big mouth" at times. People born in the Chinese New Year of the Dragon are healthy, energetic, excitable, short-tempered, and stubborn. They are also honest, sensitive, brave, and they inspire confidence and trust.

Dragons neither borrow money nor make flowery speeches, but they tend to be soft-hearted which sometimes gives others an advantage over them. Dragons are well suited to be an artist, priest, or politician.



### **APIO Past President Receives Honor Award**

Past president Peter Bautista received an NRCS national 2011 Civil Rights Team Award. Bautista, along with Kalven Trice, Black Organization president, and Luis Hernandez, Hispanic Organization President, received the awards primarily for the role they served as Joint Training Conference organizers in March 2010 in St. Louis, MO.

### **Bautista to Serve on National CR Committee**

Peter Bautista has been selected for the National Civil Rights Committee to serve as the AAPI-Male member for the next three years.

*A proud moment for us all!  
Thank you, Peter.  
Jay*

# CHIEF SAYS NRCS DOES INCREDIBLE WORK

Holiday Message from Chief Dave White

Dec. 2011



Greetings, NRCSers:

In my 35 years with NRCS I've seen some incredible work.

I've seen our conservation practices help American producers reduce soil erosion by more than 40 percent...

I've seen farmers enrolled in our programs realize record crop yields, following years of disappointing seasons...

I've seen NRCSers create nearly half a million acres of instant wetland habitat in three months, helping millions of migratory birds find refuge from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill...

I've seen agriculture transformed from being the leading cause of wetland loss to the leading cause of wetland restoration...

I've seen ranchers and partners across the West come together to protect critical Sage Grouse habitat, giving these rare birds a new lease on life and ranchers more sustainable, healthy ranchlands...

With our help, I've seen families keep their homes and restore their land after storms... and I've seen hard-working underserved farmers get a chance at a fair start...

The list goes on. And after 35 years, there's one thing I've come to recognize without a shadow of a doubt: NRCSers are a force to be reckoned with.

NRCSers are capable of accomplishing great things. In our line of work, success doesn't mean ensuring wide profit margins for investors or impressing a board of directors. In our work, success means changing the course of history – determining the fate of our environment, our livelihoods, and the future health of our landscape for those who follow in our footsteps.

This year, we made a huge impact for natural resource conservation. We helped more than 190,000 producers implement conservation programs on their lands. We applied more than 1.2 million conservation practices and enrolled more than 27 million acres of land into conservation programs. We committed more than \$2.3 billion in financial and technical assistance to our customers.

These are outstanding results for conservation that have not gone

unnoticed. NRCS is recognized government-wide as being a “can do” Agency that gets the job done.

I couldn't be more proud of the work we accomplished this year, and I know even more successes are on the horizon. As we wrap-up 2011 and head out to celebrate the holidays with our friends and families, please know how proud I am of our NRCS family – all 11,909 of us across the country – who are making a difference.

I am deeply humbled and appreciative of the work you do each and every day.

Happy Holidays, NRCSers, I'll be back in touch with you in the New Year!

Dave White  
Chief, NRCS

# LY PARTICIPATES IN HMONG NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

by *Phuong Ly, California*

I was extremely excited when I was invited to attend the Hmong New Year Celebration in the traditional Hmong clothing. It was my honor to be able to attend the open ceremony that was held on October 8-9, 2011 and the closing ceremony on November 20 in Oroville, Calif.

Traditionally, each town holds its own celebration and invites others outside of the town to partake in this festivity. During the New Year's celebration, Hmong will dress in traditional clothing and enjoy their traditional foods and entertainment. Hmong New Year celebrations frequently occur at the end of the harvest season in November and December. The purpose of the New Year celebration is to get rid of the evil or bad influences that had happened that year and to invoke good fortune for the coming New Year. This celebration is also known as the "mating season" to the Hmong because traditionally it was the only time for them to get together after a whole year of hard work in the rice fields or any other operations.

California has a few cities including Fresno, Sacramento, Stockton and other smaller cities, that host this festive event annually. Each city has its own ceremony with great entertainment, food and amazing Hmong clothing that generally last for about a month.

In Oroville, there was an event each weekend until the closing ceremony. The closing ceremony goes off with the big bang that involves more great food and entertainment. The foods were important for that night because ideally they were made from their best cow(s) that they had raised for. This showcases that there will be more food this following year.

I hope this New Year will bring them good health, happiness and prosperity.



It took about an hour for Maisee (left) and her family to put on the traditional Hmong clothing. The clothing was made to capture attention and the jewelries were to hope that they will be receiving that much or more this New Year.



One of the Hmong traditional dishes is the papaya salad. It was made instantly with fresh Thai chili, strips of green papaya, fresh squeezed lime juice, garlic, tomatoes, fish sauce, and family recipe sauce.



The closing ceremony was coordinated by Kayeng Vue, President of the Oroville Hmong Organization, the Vue family, and many others. It was an amazing to be able to listen to one of the traditional Hmong music as one of the entertainment.

# Asian Farmers are Big Business in Maryland

— by *Oliver Miranda, Maryland*

Maryland's AAPI Program Manager Chris Powles gathered information from the 2007 Census of Agriculture about Asian farmers in Maryland. There are 142 Asian producers in Maryland farming 6, 606 acres of land with an average farm size of 65 acres. The market value of products sold is over \$72.7 M.

Here are two of their stories . . .

## CHICKEN FARMING IN MARYLAND IS A NEW CHALLENGE FOR VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

— by *Oliver Miranda, Maryland*



Johnathan and Muoi Tran started as refugees from Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam and ended up as chicken farmers on Maryland's Eastern Shore. As two young students in their late teens, Johnathan and Muoi fled Vietnam in 1980 in order to escape the communist regime in the wake of the war.

Their first stop was Indonesia via boat. In Indonesia, they were kept in a refugee camp for more than a year, where they learned a little bit of English and American culture. Several countries were

open to taking refugees, but Muoi said, "Everyone wanted to go to America!"

In order for that to happen, the couple needed to be sponsored. Muoi found her sponsor through a family member who had already made it to America, while the Catholic Church offered Johnathan sponsorship. So, in 1982, they made their way to Southern California.

The Trans were placed with jobs upon arrival, but they were both laid off after a year, so they decided to start their own business. They started a small sandwich shop and it eventually flourished into a successful enterprise. After years of long hours, increasing competition, and government regulation, Muoi and Johnathan decided that they needed a change.

The Trans heard from a friend who had moved to Maryland that raising chickens did not require long hours and paid well, so, in 2008, they sold their sandwich shop and moved to Somerset County, MD. After arriving they soon realized that raising chickens was not as easy as they were led to believe. After a stressful beginning, Johnathan and Muoi found their way to the Conservation District office, where the assistance they received helped them stabilize their operation through financial and technical assistance.

Though still adjusting, Johnathan and Muoi have settled into the community and have a network of Vietnamese friends and family in the area.

## LOOKING FOR PART-TIME WORK AND FULL-TIME PAY, THESE GROCERS TURN TO CHICKEN FARMING

— by *Oliver Miranda, Maryland*



Like many chicken farmers, Clara Lee was lured into the business with the prospect of full time pay and part-time work. Three years later, Clara is working 10 hours a day and the pay was never quite what she expected.

Clara and her husband, Haejong, emigrated separately to the U.S. from Seoul, South Korea, but through their common cultural roots they met in Baltimore around 10 years ago. Clara moved to the U.S. as a young woman in 1980, following her brother who

moved to the U.S. a few years earlier.

Haejong came to the U.S. a little over ten years ago. Back in Seoul, Haejong was an outdoor educator, which he describes as being very similar to our 4-H programs in the U.S. While traveling to the U.S. for work in 1999, Haejong decided that he liked the U.S. so much that he was going to stay.

Besides owning a grocery store in Baltimore, Clara and Haejong also own a townhouse and other properties. Haejong manages most of the business in Baltimore, while Clara runs the chicken farm.

They found the chicken farm when looking at opportunities for retirement. A realtor from Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore was hosting meetings around Baltimore, selling the easy life of a chicken farmer. So, in spite of their lack of experience with chickens, in 2008, Haejong and Clara bought a chicken farm in Somerset County.

Clara said they have learned a lot since they began their farming enterprise. At first, they relied heavily on the large South Korean chicken farming population in the area, and later found their way to the Somerset Conservation District office.

Recently, Haejong and some friends have formed a loose network of 50+ South Korean poultry farmers. Currently, they do not meet regularly, but they have developed a directory of emails and phone numbers to use as a resource when problems or opportunities arise. Haejong hopes to formalize the group in the future, but already the network has proved useful.