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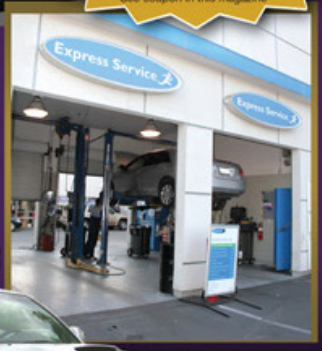


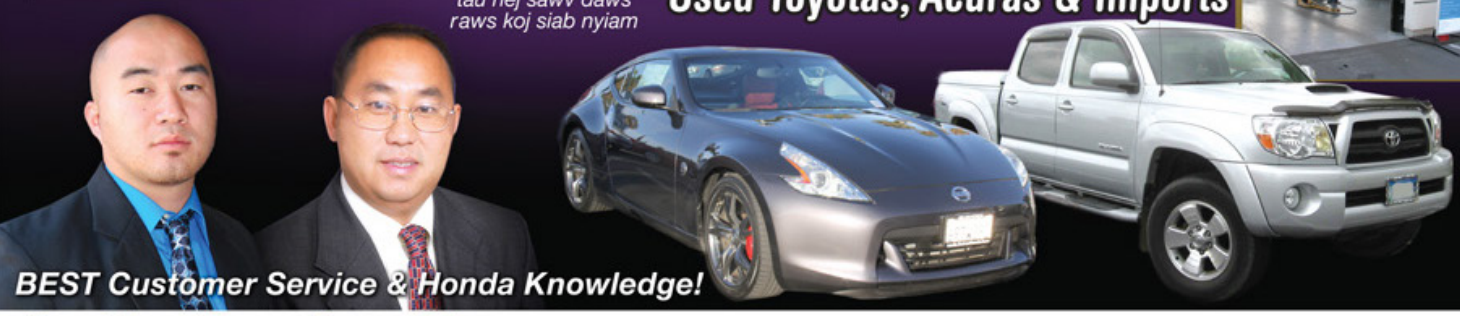

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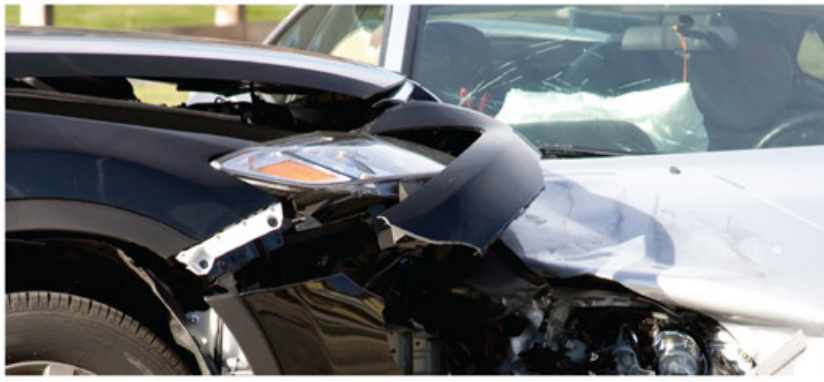
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Lar Yang
*Txhawb publisher,*
*founder of Yang Design*

Youa Za Yang
*Txhawb Associate - publisher,*
*Yang Property Management*

As a child, I remember vividly that I had always struggled in school. I remember being in ESL classes up until about the end of primary school. I think because my generation was the first group of Hmong Refugees to attend school, we always felt hopelessly lost and alone through this endeavor. I had very little confidence and guidance in those early years.

But something changed around fourth grade year. I had a teacher who had so much belief in me that through that experience, I learned how to believe in myself as well and it transformed me into a completely different person. School became effortless and I sponged information because I never wanted to have my teacher think that she had developed a misconception about the person I was and the person I would potentially grow to become.

To believe in someone or to believe in an idea is such a powerful driving force. This belief actually transforms into a power that can push individuals to achieve great things, reach impossible goals and overcome overwhelming challenges.

Throughout much of my young adult life, I have been fortunate to have had so many people help shape me into a better person personally and professionally by believing and trusting my work. That is part of the reason why I choose to give back to my community; because of all it's given to me.

In our community, we always talk about helping each other because we are all Hmong and we all belong to a brotherhood or extended family. I think we have to truly learn how to "BELIEVE." To dream of a community where we will support each other in business and in each others time of need. This believing process will help to create a tangible road map for us. We need to learn how to invest, inspire and teach our younger generations - to give them the tools which empower them to believe as well. There are so many talented young people in our community, but if we are not willing to invest and grow their talent, when they blossom, they will not have any commitments or loyalty to our community.

As Hmong people, we will always need our community, but our community really needs us. We need to help make it better and stronger than it currently is.

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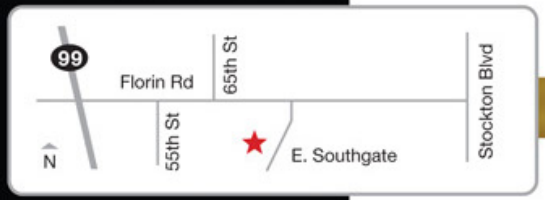
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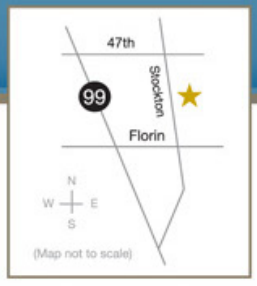
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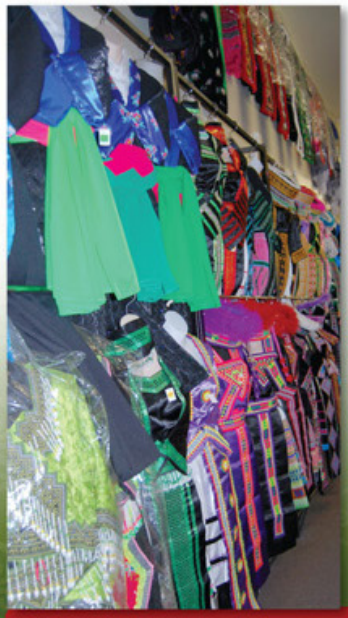
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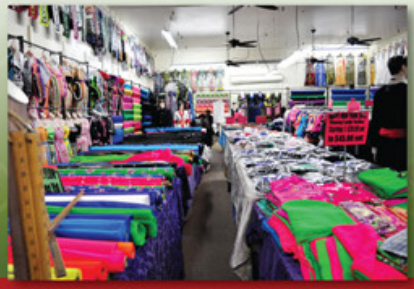
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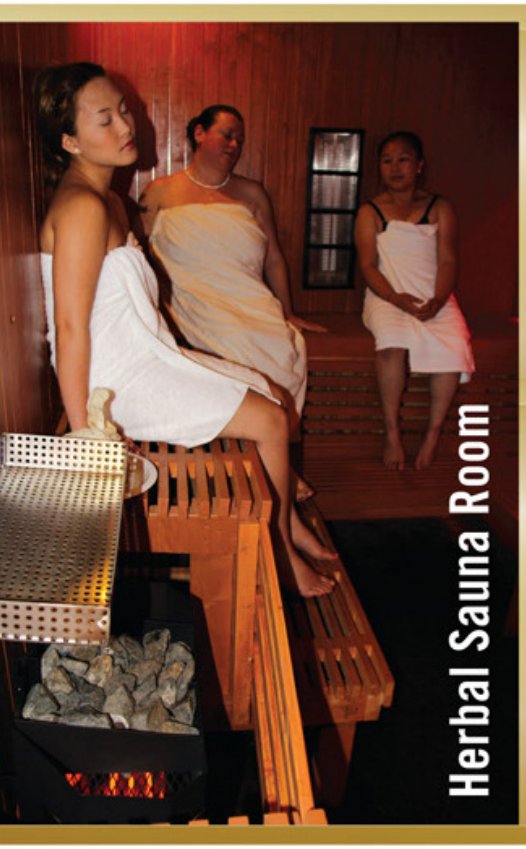
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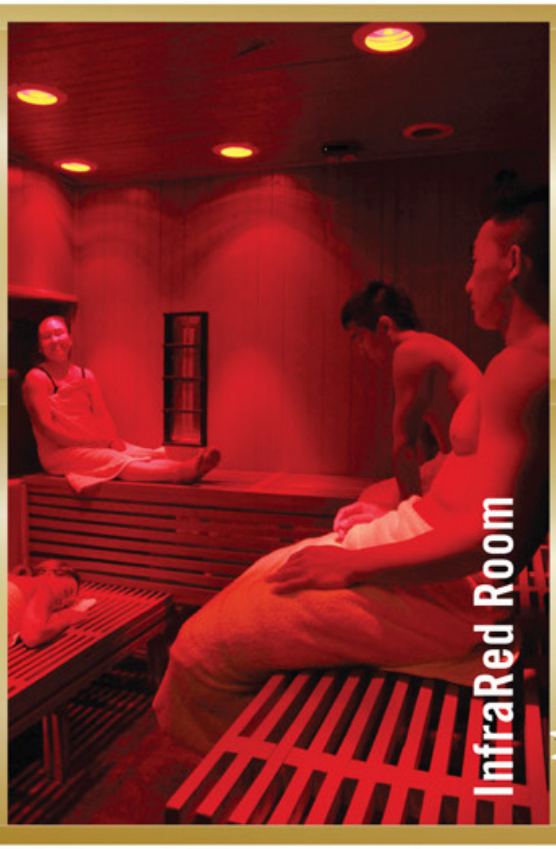
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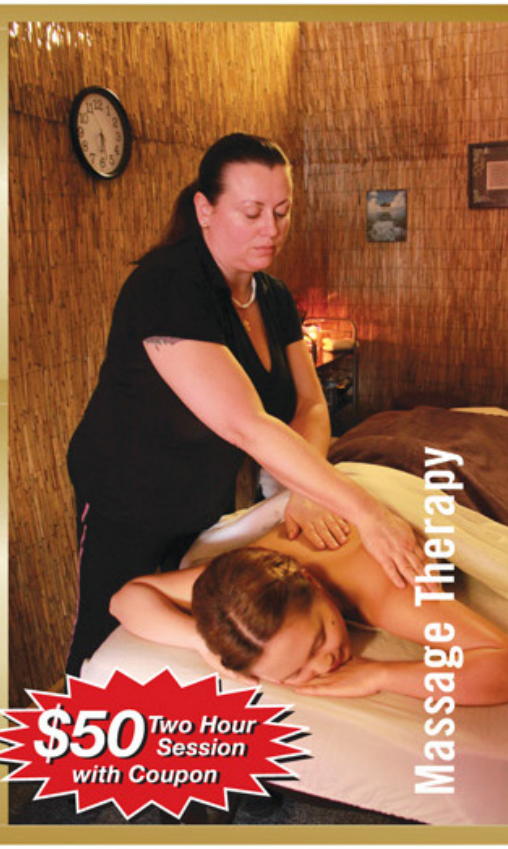
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HMONG CALIFORNIA DIRECTORY
2013 EDITION 6

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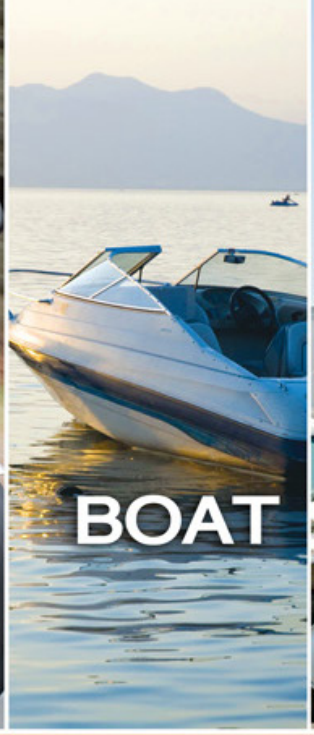
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W H A T  I S  T H E

# HMONG SOUL

Written by Michelle Xiong

**Ring! Ring!** I slowly open my eyes to look at my phone. "Mom and Dad" appears on the screen as I look to see who was calling. I know it's my Mom calling to check up on me, to do a favor and the usual, to make sure I'm not doing anything she doesn't think I should be doing, which is just about anything.

*Geez, that's terrible, I think to myself as I clear my throat and sit up to make it seem like I was up, since it was noon. This is what I think when my mom calls, that something is wrong, that something isn't good enough, or that she's calling because she needs something, which is never really a favor but more like a demand. All of these thoughts pop in my head in the few short seconds before I pick up.*

"Hi, Mom," I said, already feeling guilty for almost not wanting to pick up her phone call and being an ungrateful daughter.

"Why do I call and you don't pick up? I called you four or five times yesterday. You didn't pick up," she said, stating the obvious and the facts. *In my head I'm thinking, uh, where's the "Hello, how are you doing?" But I guess that went out the window when I didn't pick up the first time.*

"I know, Mom. I'm sorry. I was out last night and couldn't really pick up." *I told her the truth because it was the truth, and because I know she knows I'm lying when I don't tell her the truth.*

"See, I knew you were out and that's why you didn't pick up. You probably just got up."

"Yes, Mom, I did just get up. How are you? What are you doing?"

"Your dad and I need you to not go anywhere this weekend and come home. We're going to ua neeg and need you to be here." Ua neeg is a religious Hmong ceremony that requires preparing a large meal and is usually attended by close relatives.

*What? I suddenly sit up a little straighter and thoughts about the upcoming weekend start clicking in my head as I try to counteract her casual dictate with anything worthy of a fight. I wanted to keep my weekend open because some mutual friends of friends were going to stop by from out state. Okay, fine. This may not be the fight worth fighting for, I quickly concluded…as if I really had a choice.*

"Okay, I'll be home this weekend," I said in a defeated tone.

"Make sure you come home on Friday to help me clean and run some errands. I know you won't wake up early on Saturday. We'll be done by the time you get here, so be here Friday. Okay?" She dragged out the "Aaaaahhhhh" in Hmong to emphasize her sternness.

"Uuhhhh," I said in Hmong, letting her know I understood.

"Uhh uhh, but we'll see," she said, to let me know that she was doubtful whether or not I would be true to my word, but hoping that I would prove her wrong.

"I'll be there," I reassured her.

"We'll see," she said, not giving in.

"Okay. Bye, Mom," I emphasized the bye to let her know that I was hanging up.

I looked at my recent calls and saw four missed calls from her. I let the guilty feeling linger. I sat in bed asking myself why it was so hard for me to make the two-hour trip home to help my parents. Nothing good enough came to mind. All the cooking, table setting, cleaning seemed so miniscule compared to all the work my parents put into this traditional practice. But somehow the ceremony (ua neeg) became more of a burden than a practice that I wanted to fulfill. I went home that Friday, and by the time the weekend was over, I didn't think more of it. However, a few months later I moved back home to live with my parents.

The challenges of living back home felt burdensome and inconvenient, similar to being told to come home to ua neeg. I was upset by the obligations imposed on me, and then I was upset for feeling obligated because these were my parents. I was ashamed. As I adjusted to living with my parents, balancing work and a social life, I realized I was hardly paying any attention to my parents. I quickly learned that I wasn't the only one growing older. I needed to help take care of my parents. I wanted and struggled to understand this new growth that I was experiencing, but I couldn't embrace fast enough.

Unfortunately I didn't wake up one day and put my parents at the top of my list. My realization was far more reactive and I found myself in the emergency room with my Mom whose blood sugar was at 585 when it should be no more than 180 (non-fasting). That night in the ER not only forced me to find a way to help my Mom recognize the severity of her diabetes, but more importantly, it made me want to know her better and understand the things she cares about.

A few weeks later my Mom and I went to her follow up appointment. Her lack of knowledge about diabetes, what she's heard from others, her personal views, her fears and other factors all affect the way she

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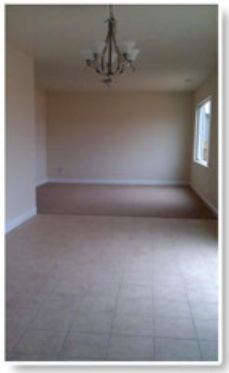
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manages her health. Talking to her and hearing her share these thoughts relieved some of the frustration and anger I had at her for not taking her medication as directed or injecting insulin. As I opened up to her, I wanted to understand so much more of her, her cultural values, practices and beliefs that she and my father have taught me.

Leaving the doctor's office that day, I remembered the Hmong story cloths that used to hang on the walls of that office, which happened to be the same doctor I went to as a child. The Hmong story clothes reminded me of the folktale of the creation of Hmong.



The story on the cloth begins with a couple named "Nkawm Kab Yeeb" who were the first two people on earth created by "Yawm Saub" who is known as the Hmong creator. They are always referred to as a couple, which is "Nkawm" with the name being "Kab Yeeb."

The couple is actually a brother and sister who asked Yawm Saub why there were no other people. So Yawm Saub instructed them to each roll a rock down opposite mountain tops, and if they landed on top of each other at the bottom that meant that they were destined to marry and have children. The brother, being faster, ran to the bottom of the mountains and placed one rock on the other, knowing that that would be the only way that they could create more people.

Yawm Saub then told them to wait nine years before they could conceive. However when they did conceive, there wasn't a baby but a lump of meat that Nkawm Kab Yeeb separated into pieces that they divided across the land. From each of those pieces came each group of people with a different last name that we call Hmong clans today. Although this story is told a little differently from different people, the significance is that Nkawm Kab Yeeb becomes the keeper of the Hmong soul or spirit.

As I learned more about traditional Hmong practices, I began integrating what I was hearing with what I witnessed growing up. My interpretation may be different from others, but I'm learning to tell it in my own words through my own understanding.

The spirit of the soul begins with the birth of every child. An essential practice that happens right after a baby's birth is the burial of the placenta. The burial of the placenta represents the beginning and end of the soul's journey. When a person passes, the spirit traces its way back to the placenta to reclaim it in order to return to the spiritual world to be reincarnated. In homes that were built in Laos, which were built on dirt, the male's placenta was buried by the main pillar which was located at the center of the house. The female's placenta was buried under the parent's bed wherever that was located in the house. Traditionally the men stay with the parents and the women marry and leave their families. (This particular practice probably doesn't happen anymore as a result of the many changes that Hmong have experienced living in the United States.)

When a child is born, there is a ritual known as the calling of the spirit (Hu Plig) that takes place on the third day after the child's birth. This is performed at the front door step where the wandering spirit of the baby is called to come into contact with the body.

Following the calling is the separation of the spiritual bond between the baby and Nkawm Kab Yeeb where they are honored and thanked for the birth of the child. This practice is out of obligation as well as appreciation, because if this doesn't happen, Nkawm Kab Yeeb will determine that the child is not going to be loved, leaving the child prone to sickness and even death if the appropriate precautions are not taken.

Traditionally after the first month, there is another ceremony (Khi Tes) where close relatives are asked to be present to tie a string on the baby's wrist to show Nkawm Kab Yeeb that the baby is loved and welcomed to the family. This made me think about how alert my Mom is when my siblings make innocent jokes about their children (her grandchildren). Any time she hears a joke, she immediately responds with a contrasting statement to make up for it, and then she firmly reminds us to be more mindful. That is how sensitive the spirit of a person is, especially that of a child. Whenever your spirit is hurt, your well-being and health can be compromised.

There are several rituals performed early on when a child is born. It is a critical time when the child's spirit is highly vulnerable

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and exposed to many dangers. As depicted in the drawing, the act of cutting the baby's hair is to rid the baby of any negative energy that could have been experienced through the birthing process, which is viewed as a very traumatic process.

As a child I remember my grandfather painting a cross-like figure on my baby nephew's forehead before my nephew left the house. At that time I didn't know that that ritual symbolized the spirit of my nephew being claimed, that he belonged to our family, to ward off any evil spirits.

is a Hmong instrument in coordination with the "Nruas", which is similar to a drum. All of these individuals are specifically skilled in their role because they are required to help the spirit find its way back home.

My Dad began playing the qeej at a very young age. Although I can't understand what is being said when he plays, he has encouraged me to observe, listen and ask questions at funerals to better understand the many responsibilities that are involved in such an elaborate occasion. Guiding the spirit back is an



Throughout one's life, the spirit is continuously being protected by the family's annual practice of ua neeg, where animals, such as a chicken, pig or cow, are sacrificed. The resistance that I had before to help my parents prepare for a traditional ceremony slowly disappeared as I developed a new understanding and appreciation of honoring the spirit of the soul.

One of the most esteemed practices of honoring the spirit happens at death. The end of a person's life is as important as the beginning. During the funeral there are key individuals who help guide the spirit back to the spiritual world to be reincarnated. This is done by the "Qhuab Ke" who is verbally guiding the spirit back to its birth. In addition to being guided by the "Qhuab Ke", the spirit is accompanied by the qeej which

intricate and delicate process, especially if the spirit is not ready to return. These individuals can only guide the spirit to a certain point, and from there they can only advise the spirit on how to complete the rest of its journey.

Everywhere that the spirit has been is the path that it needs to travel back on to return safely to the spiritual world. Once the spirit finds its home where the placenta was buried, the spirit must dig it up and take it back in order to be reincarnated. Usually when someone is said to have returned to Laos, that means that that person has passed and her/his spirit has gone home wherever the placenta was buried. Before Laos they would say China, which is where Hmong originated.

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The spirit of the soul is so fragile, yet I've fallen into the trap of neglecting it. From taking away my weekend to taking off work, I never thought of it as taking care of myself and the ones I love. These ceremonies and practices are not a burden or inconvenience, but an obligation to give back to my soul. I hope that I can practice this more and that these practices are passed on to others.

The intention of this story is not to explain how each traditional practice happens. It is to share my passion to learn about a faith that I don't fully understand, but that I value because it is what keeps me grounded. I know that whatever challenges I'm faced with, I am rooted in the foundation that my parents have built for me; and that is what gives me the will to overcome any test in life. Even though I may not be able to emulate each of these traditions, I know that I've acquired their values and beliefs. That is what has helped me shape the foundation of who I am.

The paintings for this story were painted by Boonma Yang and will be on exhibit in the near future. Three separate panels form one complete picture of the whole cycle of the Hmong soul.
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# A VOICE FOR THE COMMUNITY
## STEVE LY

Written by Seng A. Vang



### ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH, 2012,

Steve Ly became the first Asian American to be elected onto the Elk Grove Unified School District Board of Education, and the first Hmong elected official in Northern California. Ly won by a landslide with nearly 67% of the vote and more than 57,000 votes to defeat incumbent Jake Rambo, an administrative law judge. Elk Grove Unified School District is the fifth largest school district in California and the largest in Northern California serving more than 64,000 students. Ly is the fifth Hmong American elected official onto a school board or city council in California (Paul Lo, Dr. Tony Vang, Blong Xiong, and Noah Lor).

Steve Ly was born in Laos and arrived in the United States in 1976 at the age of four. Ly's family was first sponsored to Gardena near Los Angeles then relocated to Clovis. Ly grew up working in the fields of his family's small farm like many other Hmong who resettled in the Central Valley. These experiences taught him the values of hard work and the importance of higher education. After graduating from Clovis High School Ly went to attend the University of California Davis and graduated with Bachelors in Political Science and Sociology. Ly later completed a Doctor of Jurisprudence from University of Northern California. Ly has worked for Sacramento County Office of Education since 1997. He is a parent in Elk Grove Unified School District and wife, Cua Lo-Ly works as a library media teacher in the District.



# AS A YOUTH LY, ENJOYED READING ABOUT HISTORY

Ly recalls his father telling him stories about how Hmong soldiers rescued down U.S. pilots. Unsure if these stories were true, Ly was hungry to learn more. He conducted research about Hmong history in high school and organized an event at Clovis High School that invited Hmong veterans to come talk about their experiences during the Secret War. "Soon after I learned about these experiences, I felt a responsibility as a Hmong person, to educate others about the sacrifices and contributions the Hmong have made," said Ly. "Telling our stories and fighting for our place in the U.S. became a lifelong cause. Everywhere I went, if I had the opportunity, I made it a priority."

Some may not remember that Ly first ran for School Board ten years ago and was defeated in his first attempt. When asked about what motivated him to run again for Elk Grove Unified School Board, Ly replied, "I wanted to be a catalyst for change." For Ly that change meant running for office to be in a position to influence policy. "My father passed away 11 years ago when I was in my second year of law school and did not finish," shared Ly, "my family went through two deaths within the same year." After going through that I wanted to do something bigger to inspire others so I ran for School Board but did not win. Ly strongly believe that if you are passionate about something you must keep going. He eventually went back and completed his law degree.

Ly cited Abraham Lincoln who is one of the most influential Presidents and role model in his life. Ly learned about the many years Lincoln failed at running for elected offices in Congress and as a nominee for Vice President. The one key successful time that Lincoln did win was when he ran for President. Ly believes that the one who doesn't give up will win in the end. "It's about the journey that matters. There are lessons to be learned in your failures and when a second chance presents itself you apply those lessons to win," stated Ly.

Steve Ly decided to run again when the opportunity presented itself this past fall. Ly states "We need to get involved in order to create change." For who choose not to get involved it is difficult for decision makers to listen when they complain about issues affecting them. Ly knows that there can be different strategies to approach policy based on his community activism experience as a college student at demonstrations to demand for bilingual interpreters. He discovered that sometimes in order for decision makers to listen you need to be proactive and be at the table to influence the policy ahead of implementation. He understands that outcomes may not always be exactly what you want but as a compromise it is better than to be reactionary to how a policy affects the community.









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# LY'S SECOND CAMPAIGN FACED MANY CHALLENGES

## AND TO WIN A SEAT WAS EXCEPTIONAL FOR SEVERAL REASONS.

First Ly was running as an underdog in an area considered "conservative" against incumbent, Jake Rambo. Second the campaign collaborated with several other school board candidates, Perez and Forcina in Elk Grove and also had the support of Elk Grove Mayor Jim Cooper and Mayor-elect Gray Davis. And lastly the campaign relied on the more than 250 youth and volunteers to get the word out which resulted in Ly winning the seat.

The campaign generated a lot interest from many youth, college students and young professionals and was able to utilize that energy from the volunteers. Mai Yang Vang, decided to volunteer as campaign coordinator for Steve's campaign not because he was Hmong--but because she believed in his vision of equity. She shared "As the eldest of 16, I knew how important Steve's win was to my family--we had a stake in this school board race because 7 of my siblings attend schools in the District. I wanted the best advocate for my siblings and I knew Steve was that candidate." She states "This win could not have happened without the dedication and hard work from our volunteers. They phone banked, precinct walked and dropped campaign literature to over 12,000 homes - the youth and the Hmong community made this win a reality." As a result of collaboration the campaign helped elect three new board members and changed the political dynamic of an entire school board. According to Vang, "Our campaign sent a positive statement, that the youth and the Hmong community is here to stay. We are making our mark and our voices will be heard."

As the only Hmong American elected to office in Northern California with a seat at the table on the Elk Grove School Board, Ly understands the important role he will have in representing not just the District but also being a voice for the Hmong American community. Ly stresses that the community needs to stay civically engaged and visible to remind others who we are, why we are here and what issues are important to the community. Win or lose we need to voice our issues and continue to be part of the process. Being in a position of leadership does not mean that all the solutions to problems in the community will happen overnight but it's a start to making meaningful changes. Ly is committed to a life in public service. His twenty years of work history, volunteering, and community activism experiences reflects that belief.

When asked what are some important issues Ly replied implementing AB78 which was a law passed to include the experiences of Southeast Asians into social studies curriculum. He is interested in the disaggregation of Asian Pacific Islander data in order to dispel the model minority myth. During his time at UC Davis in 1992, Ly was taught to be critical of data. He believes that disaggregating data will allow the School Board to see disparities and address inequities in the district.

"Education gave me a wealth of knowledge, early on, my parents didn't get an education and they taught me that education will help you become a key player in making change, people will take



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you seriously,"stated Ly. "I know that public education is the key equalizing factor in America. In order for our community to become successful and move forward we need to educate every child." He believes that the role of education is very important to children and the community. When Ly attended UC Davis twenty years ago, there were only about 25 Hmong students. The student group organized the Higher Education Conference every year to bring hundreds of high school students to campus and inspired a generation of college students to attend UC Davis. Today there are more than 300 Hmong students at Davis. Ly is convinced they so they made an impact in outreach to the community about the importance of higher education.

Ly's message to the community is "don't give up when you lose and everyday take the opportunity to learn something new. The youth embodies the hopes of our communities and this successful campaign was about their future. No one thought we would win but we believed and this shows what can happen when people work together for a common good. With Ly's




recent win there is already a lot of excitement and interest about his future political plans among his constituents. Many community members have expressed that the total amount of votes is the most any Hmong candidate has ever received in the history of American politics. Ly won with more than 57,000 votes which is comparable to some California Assembly district or other state level races. This amount is also three times the number of votes Minnesota State Senator-elect Foung Heu or former Minnesota State Senator Mee Moua secured to win their campaigns. When asked about possibilities at the state level Ly replied "I will consider those opportunities if they present themselves." Ly emphasized that not all issues may be resolved at the local level such as budget allocation but for now his is focused on the current office and plan on doing the best possible job for the students of Elk Grove Unified. On December 13th, 2012, Steve Ly will be officially inaugurated as a Trustee of the Elk Grove Unified School District Board of Education.

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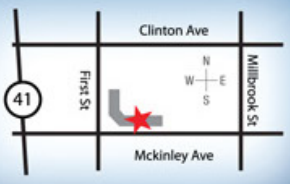
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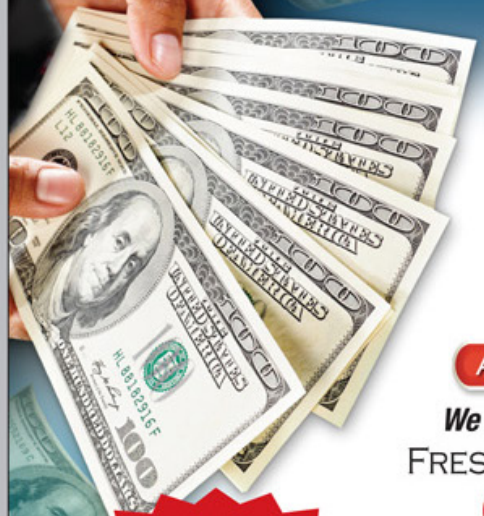

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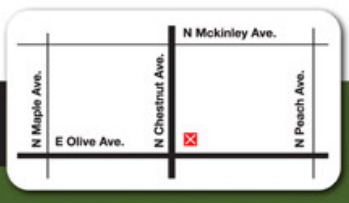

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# VANG PAO

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OPENS FALL 2012

Written by: Samantha P. Yang & Pov M. Xyooj
Photos by: Kao Lee



General Vang Pao's passing on January 6, 2011 marked an end to a chapter for the Hmong, but this loss brings with it an opportunity for growth, and new possibilities are created for future generations. On August 20, 2012 the first school in the United States to be named after a key leader in the history of the Hmong people, General Vang Pao Elementary, opened its doors in Fresno, California. The school is equipped with the latest technologies to best help teachers effectively teach and engage students.



The dedication ceremony, held on the school's campus on September 8, 2012, showcased the life, impact, and vision of Vang Pao. Over 700 members from the community were in attendance, including students, parents, staff, and school and city officials. Vang Pao Elementary School's principal, Teresa Calderon, opened the ceremony with a warm welcome speech. Among those invited to speak was Fresno Unified School District Superintendent Michael Hanson, who expressed his pleasure to be able to "honor a man who was a genuine hero".



The faculty, students, and members of Vang Pao's family in attendance wore shirts printed by the General Vang Pao Project bearing the words, "Education is the key to success." Retired Fresno Unified School board member, Dr. Tony Vang thanked General Vang Pao for having instilled in him the appreciation of education that has led to his own successes and achievements. "I would not be standing here today if it wasn't for the general's foresight. He {General Vang Pao} recognized that education would pull his people from poverty."


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Susan Vang, a sixth grader at Vang Pao Elementary talks excitedly about her new school with fellow classmates. When asked if she knew who Vang Pao was, she replies, "He's the one that helped us come here," smiling, as she continues on handing out pamphlets to attendees of the dedication ceremony. This short response encapsulates with it the origins of the Hmong American experience. As demonstrated by Susan's response, having the school named after Vang Pao not only commemorates a great individual, it acknowledges all the lives lost during the United States' Secret War in Laos, as well as the Hmong refugee and diaspora experiences. It also serves as an heirloom our generation leaves for the generations to follow.

Having the name "Vang Pao" attached to a school represents more than just the recognition and honoring of an individual. The name, itself, has come to take on a life and meaning of its own that is separate from the individual himself. It had come to represent: the life line for those whose lives were displaced during the civil war in Laos during the early 50s, lasting until the mid 70s; the glimmering light of hope for families to immigrate to a new country for a better future; the pathway for parents to give their children an education that they can only dreamed of; the identity youths have come to question, asking "Who is General Vang Pao and why was he revered as such a great leader to so many people"; and an end to a chapter where a new one beings. The steps that were taken to get a school named after General Vang Pao exemplifies the strength of the Hmong community and its progress in bridging the generational gap lies, not just within the Hmong community, but within all immigrant communities.

Fellow Ching Yang, a volunteer for the ceremony stated that, "It is a plus for the community and definitely brings us a step forward". Individuals, supporters and family members of General Vang Pao had gathered over 10,000 signatures in support of the naming of the school after the late general. It was the first time Fresno Unified School District had signatures of support in the naming of a school campus.

As the governing board continued to reduce the names to the top ten appropriate community figures, at last General Vang Pao's name made it, but it was on the very bottom of that list.

On February 8, 2011 a Fresno Unified School District board meeting was underway. Emotions were high that night as the board members were voting on the final name to be chosen for the new elementary school in Southeast Fresno. Numerous community individuals arrived in support of the naming.

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When the Fresno Unified School Board opened to the community the suggestions of names to name a newly built elementary school in southeast Fresno, there were 116 names that were nominated; One of them being Vang Pao. When the list was cut down to the top ten names, Vang Pao was on the very bottom of the list. On the day which the school board would be deciding which one of the ten names would be used to name the newly built school, hundreds of people went to the school board meeting in support for naming the school after General Vang Pao. There were a total of 19 community members, ranging from business owners, community organizers, and elected offices who spoke in front of the board expressing their support for the naming of the school after General Vang Pao.

One in particular was a male Hmong high school student who expressed to the school board that even though he did not personally know who General Vang Pao was or what he have accomplished, he is able to feel the impact that Vang Pao have had on the Hmong community. After all the community members addressed their support, the Fresno Unified School Board unanimously voted in favor to name the newly built school in Southeast Elementary School as Vang Pao Elementary School.

Fresno Unified School District's Superintendent Michael Hanson stated that he was honored to have elective officials; businesses and community present the district with over 10,000 names in support of naming the Southeast School after the late General Vang Pao and stated, " This pending action tonight should be viewed as a sign of the district's recognition of the Hmong community of decade's long march towards full and complete respect and admiration by our larger community."

The naming of Vang Pao Elementary after a Hmong person represents a historical accomplishment for Hmong Americans.

It represents the efforts of so many people from within the Hmong community and Fresno community as well. It is a historic accomplishment that belongs to the whole community. With the beginning of a new chapter, that has yet to be written, for Hmong Americans, what accomplishments and stories do we want to tell and leave behind for future generations to listen, inspire, and learn from as we continue our journey forward?









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# DIABETES

## ITS IMPACT ON THE HMONG COMMUNITY

Written by Darla Vang

*When I asked Kevin, a former student at Fresno City College, to share his story about dealing with a family member who had diabetes, he declined, saying it was too personal. It was a story close to his heart which he was unwilling to share with just anybody. As with any major health condition, family members tend to bear the burden - because one person had diabetes, it felt like the whole family had it. His story of struggle may be familiar for those who are currently living with a loved one who has a chronic illness like diabetes.*

### DIABETES /INTERVENTIONS

Diabetes is also a global health issue with 346 million people diagnosed with diabetes worldwide. (3) In Fresno County alone, nearly over 37,000 people are diabetic. Although Asian Americans are known to have good health, they also face very serious chronic health issues like diabetes. This includes our very own Hmong community.

Type I diabetes is a genetic disease that is insulin dependent, whereas the choice of becoming diabetic is known as Type II diabetes, which is insulin resistant. For the purpose of this article, we are going to focus on type II diabetes.

Type II diabetes is caused by being overweight and lack of exercise. It occurs when the "pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces."(3) Insulin is a hormone in our body that encourages cells in our body to drain sugars from our blood and into the liver and muscles to be used as energy. When insulin is not available to manage the flow of sugars into our blood, it increases the risk of health outcomes such as gout, blindness, kidney failure, heart attacks, leg amputation, or death.

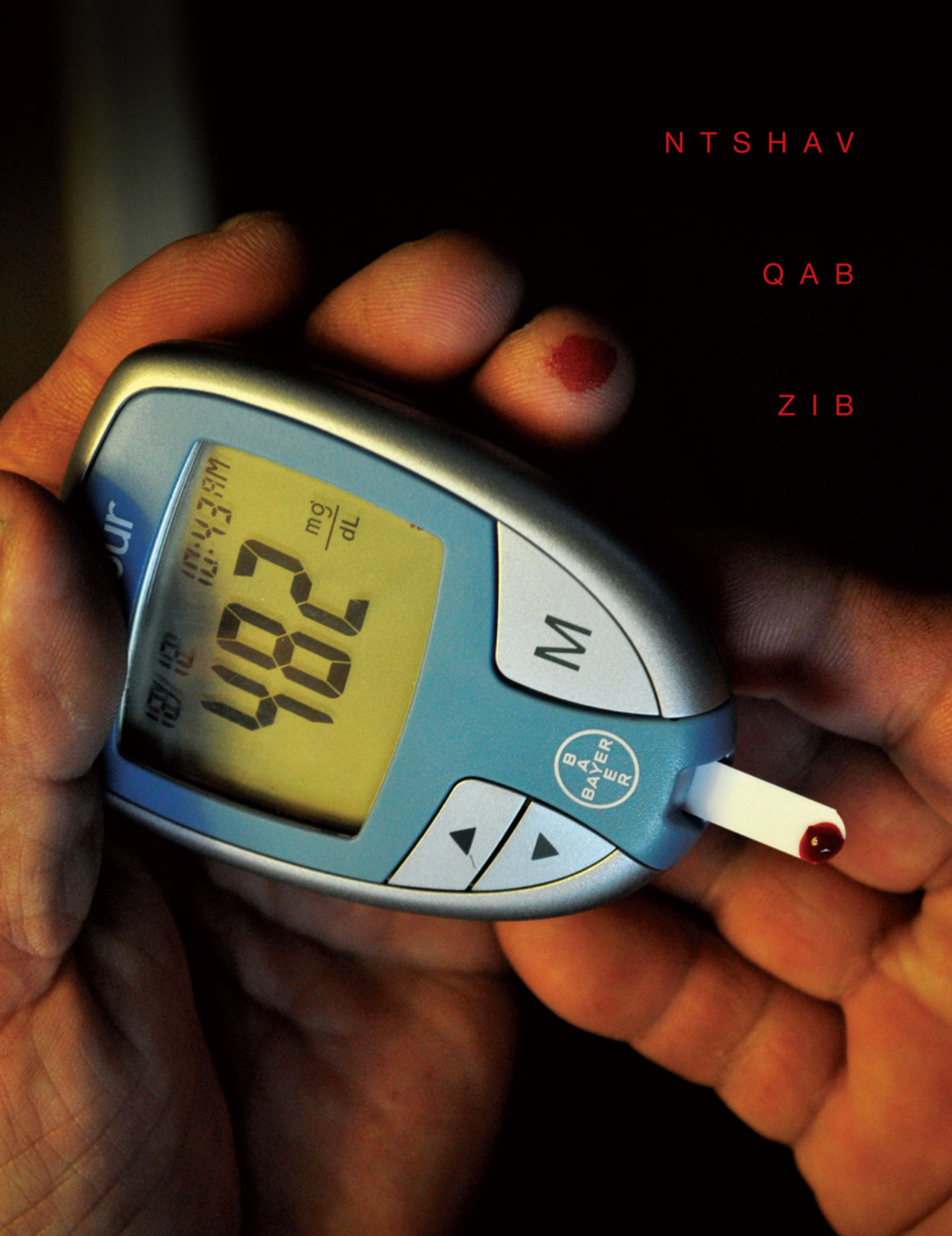
People at risk for Type II diabetes tend to be obese. Chao Vang, a nurse practitioner from Fresno's Urology Association of Central California who did her master's thesis on diabetes and its impact on the Hmong community says that many "try to starve themselves and that it is not the best idea." Alternatively, "They can eat brown rice and sometimes they take fat out of their diet, but that's not the right thing to do too. Fat is what makes your (blood sugar level) rise slowly. If you take it completely out of your diet, then whatever you eat, your sugar content will rise quickly. The fat in your body is what contains your sugar levels from going so high."

Foods that contain healthy fats are saturated, unlike transfat or unsaturated fats. Most labeled food items can help you identify the type of fat that is in the food on the "Nutrition Facts" label, like a bag of Lays or a can of Campbell's chicken noodle soup. Another situation that arises is the ideology that being diabetic means eating fruits or meat is harmful for their body, therefore only eating rice. This shows that there are people who do not understand how to manage their diet.

"Sometimes diabetics become so skinny because they think it's their weight that's causing them to be diabetic." (1) Accomplishing a new body mass index by fasting is an unhealthy choice because blood sugar levels are not controlled if they continue to eat the same things. One way to control sugar levels from rising so fast is by eating five meals a day, in small portions within proximity of three hours. Solid solutions for disease management that are effective and ethical can be delivered in a number of ways. Behavioral choices such as eating a balanced diet, exercising, making healthy choices, getting sufficient amount of sleep, and maintaining good relationships at home and work, are underlying determinants for prevention. Overall, a managed comfortable and enjoyable lifestyle is suitable for primary prevention. Along with this, it is necessary to be resourceful because we are increasingly being pushed to become more accountable for our own health and the services we receive. Evidence based data shows that poor diet, physical activity, and drinking are three risk factors that can be highly preventable- to which we should focus on specifically.

### SOCIAL COSTS

Long term care for diabetes can be stressful and very expensive, having a significant drain on family income, which could be spent on food, shelter, education, and clothing; therefore, having a huge opportunity cost.


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Larger portion sizes and senile lifestyles are also damaging to our health outcomes. Nenick Vu, chair of the Hmong Health Collaborative, elaborates that "Sedentary lifestyles for elders have become a big issue, and several times, there is not a lot of opportunity to be healthy." This also includes young people who are often playing videogames or spend their lives indulged in social media.

"The social problems are why we have health issues." (2) Of course, that does not mean giving up fatty foods or drinking, but creating an opportunity to regulate eating habits so that healthy years of life can be maintained. Additionally, we cannot force someone to change. Even if a law was made, people would not necessarily change right away until social rules enforce them the change.

We recognize diabetes as a health hazard, but why has the problem persisted? Within 40 years, there have been increasing socioeconomic and educational levels rising, but many still lack sufficient healthcare literacy. This is common across all ethnic groups. Many adults (including young adults) do not have formal knowledge of diabetes. Vu mentions that, "People often have misconceptions or fears with the kind of information they receive about diabetes." (2)

Additionally, "Many have never had the concept of awareness, and the idea of being psychologically impacted is absent cause they don't understand the process and likely won't hold onto it; even if they learned it—only when {an issue arises}, they'll try to deal with it." (2) Hmong people have a huge tolerance level when it comes to health, and we should notice these things when they happen. A greater pressing issue would be the integration of health and our culture.

## CULTURAL CLASHES

People with similar value systems tend to react similarly to healthcare, thus when speaking about the Hmong community, the values we have also correspond with how we respond to society. Cultural differences have shown to be a huge limitation to getting proper care.

A situation Nurse Vang shares is that "Primary physicians need to focus on primary prevention and sometimes physicians can fail to provide primary care," because they "don't know how to manage a patient, {then} the patient's blood sugar levels don't get checked and doctors don't diagnose properly until kidneys are dead." (1).

This is an example that demands a physical need to have more culturally competent care to provide a positive experience for patients. The cultural value and perspective created barriers because psychological issues and behaviors were poorly understood. Inherently, people of color tend to lose some of their options when looking for proper care. This is ironic especially when there is an expectation to look beyond the color of a person's skin.

Cultural problems between a patient and provider are an issue of social construction and the types of scripts we give each other. We often use generalizations to make a judgment which guides our decision and the choices we make, but that does not properly reflect how we want to be treated. Things like this are directly related to stereotypes, language barriers, and navigation into the health care system.

Everyone brings their own challenges to the task, but we can all come together to make sure that cultural competent care is practiced. For a provider, this would mean that he/she is able to use the knowledge of culture to help people better understand each other. This skill is especially important in the workforce when approaching academic works in the Hmong experience. Although people have gained an interest and are increasingly making efforts to practice culturally competent care, it has been a slow process.

Understanding cultural differences and being able to work with new cultures is a valuable skill because culture is pervasive, influencing our choices and the social world we live in as it travels through generations. We establish expectations facilitated by cultural law and "Our culture has a way of reinforcing behaviors," influencing our lives in ways most of us are completely unaware of: What people eat, how they dress, and what languages they speak are all cultural dimensions. (2) It is not genetic; rather, something we learn. It is what we see as acceptable from family and friends, and even that has the ability to transform. "Cultural competency has to be integrated completely into our approach to medicine, and we will have to create new structures for sustainable public health influences in our community." (2)

## WESTERN MEDICINE

Another underlying issue would be the relationship our community has with western medicine. Traditional, complementary and alternative medicine, or anything related to holistic health have been well known methods for healing in the Hmong community before seeking care from western medicine, so routine doctor visits are not the norm. Therefore, breaking into the Hmong community to address healthcare needs would have to be done by taking a nontraditional approach in order to find "people who are willing to champion the value of western medicine." (2).

"As proud independent people, it can be frustrating when someone tries to tell you what to do," because people like to have ownership over their own health choices. (2) "If you don't understand barriers, you get mad and don't want to submit," thus, by "figuring out what strengths of our community are to implement healthy lifestyles," we can find more thoughtful ways to improve health and bad habits. (2) This can be done by taking "a communal, oral, and relational approach to how we deal with health {in order} to reach out to the Hmong community. "(2)

## THE NEXT STEP

We are due to create an agenda to have upward mobility and fairness to alter the public culture of diet and exercise. The responsibility of the health status of a community belongs to everyone. Hmong people should not have to die because they are not informed about health risks. Medical evidence that prevents death from diabetes through exercise and diet is well established.

*(Concludes on page 60)*

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(Continued from page 54)

We need to see more signs of progress where society wants to get ahead, where we practice preventative care and improve our relationship with healthcare.

Health is a society wide issue and we need to reduce inequities and find potential solutions. No one really knows when progress will proceed, but it can become a reality to have safe, attractive, and alternative lifestyles.

We are going to "need a lot of young people willing to change that social structure and create solutions that are very intentional and comprehensive." (2) Given the value to protect public health of our Hmong community, there needs to be a paradigm shift. There is a huge demand for political motivation and solutions, concrete, manageable, and above all, measurable success to removing barriers towards good health across all populations.

People with diabetes "have to do a combination of medication and exercise." (1) Though we can eliminate poor diet and lack of exercise, the effort in healing begins with having the willingness to do what it takes to change. As Vu advocates, "we need to make a commitment to the healthcare system to respond to what each person needs and have meaningful change. Although the science and policies in health care are standardized, everyone is different," and we need to realize that one size does not fit all. Increased critical awareness for existing and potential diabetes is essential.

With that said, "When you have diabetes, you feel alone if you have the condition... It forces your lifestyle to change, but if you're with others and are table to walk together, it is comforting." Our next step is to get involved by making an effort to educate and empower our community. Diabetes is preventable and it is not a death sentence.

Interesting information about Diabetes:
November 14, is World Diabetes Day

1 Chao Vang, Urology Association of Central California
2 Nenick Vu, Hmong Health Collaborative
3 World Health Organization


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# FRESNO TO HOST THE 16TH HMONG NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

**FRESNO, CALIFORNIA** **APRIL 5-7, 2013** By: Seng Alex Vang & Bruce Thao







## THE YEAR 2013 IS HISTORIC FOR HMONG NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AS IT MARKS THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORGANIZATION.

Since its founding by community leaders from across the county in 1993, HND has advocated for the Hmong American community and been a voice in Washington, D.C. HND empowers the Hmong community to achieve prosperity and equality through education, research, policy advocacy and leadership development. Every two years, HND hosts the Hmong National Development Conference (HNDC), the premier gathering of professionals, students, and community leaders from across the country. This year, HND, in partnership with the Fresno-based organization, Hmong Empowerment Resources and Outreach (HERO), will host the conference from April 5 to 7, 2013 at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center in downtown Fresno, California.

## ABOUT THE HND CONFERENCE

The HND Conference (HNDC) embodies HND's mission and goals by bringing together community leaders, scholars, youth, business owners and more over the course of three-days and through various events to educate and discuss pressing issues in the Hmong community and identify solutions to address key issues. This year's theme, "The Journey Forward: The Next Chapter of Hmong Americans," is a call to action for the Hmong American community to recognize the disparities in our community and collectively work to address them.

The 15th HND Conference, held in Minneapolis, MN in April 2011, featured over 70 workshops presented by over 50 organizations, universities, corporations and federal agencies from across the country. It drew over 1,000 national attendees and linked participants with long-standing HND partners such as State Farm and multiple universities and federal agencies while building new partnerships with the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and others.

## WHY FRESNO?

This is the 16th year the three-day conference will be convened. The conference is organized and driven by a local planning committee with the support of HND and national advisors. In 2011, HERO submitted and won the bid to host the HNDC in Fresno. HERO is a Fresno-based, volunteer organization whose mission is to dialogue, network and collaborate to provide resources and opportunities for the Hmong community. HERO recognized that there is a lack of resources for professional and youth development in the Hmong community in Fresno and wanted to bring national attention to local issues.

Ivy Xiong, HNDC Fund Development Chair, stated, "There are many factors contributing to why I wanted HND to host their next conference in Fresno. The main reason is because Fresno needs this opportunity. Whether it be for students, young professionals, leaders, businesses or the community, Fresno needs an opportunity to bring forth the community and address critical issues that are ongoing and to create a plan, a blueprint, as to how we can overcome the issues by working together."

Vang Yang, HNDC Arts & Entertainment Chair, attended the HND conference when it was first held in Fresno in 2005. An undergraduate student at the time, Yang lacked connections to other college students and professionals in the Hmong community. He shared that, "Attending the conference, was an eye opening experience. It made me realize firsthand how big the Hmong community really is. I had never met so many Hmong professionals and college students in one place at the same time. I built many bonds and made lasting friendships with a lot of people during the conference."

The conference features over 70 workshops, plenary panels, a leadership awards banquet, networking sessions and live entertainment featuring Hmong American artists.



The conference will provide participants the opportunity to engage with national experts and agencies from multiple perspectives and learn and share best practice models for local community development. Like Yang experienced, the conference provides a rare space for many Hmong people who have never engaged with other Hmong students or professionals or talked about important issues in the community.

Pov Xyooj, HNDC Co-Chair, stated, "I feel that many youth and young professionals are not exposed to how diverse and successful Hmong are all throughout America. I want them to be inspired and to build their self confidence to believe that they can accomplish and reach their dreams and goals."

## ENGAGING PRESSING ISSUES

The conference workshops are divided into seven tracks, including: Professional Development & Business Acumen, Education, Health & Wellness, Advocacy & Civic Participation, Arts & Culture, Youth Development, & Roundtable Discussions. The latest research, innovative programming and best practice models, and facilitated discussions will touch upon key issues in the community. Some workshops will highlight issues such as domestic violence, education disparities, health disparities, gender and sexuality, transnational marriage and more.

Yang shared, "There's a lot of time and effort that we have all sacrificed in putting this year's HND conference together. We help our community by stepping up when no one is willing to. I am rewarded by knowing I have done something good and positive towards the Hmong community that I love and have grown up in. The conference may come and go, but the impact it leaves on the community stays."

If you wish to be a part of shaping the next chapter for the Hmong American community, please join us at the 16th HND Conference in Fresno, CA, April 5-7, 2013. For more information on how you can support the conference as a sponsor, community partner or volunteer please contact:

HND Conference Co-chair:
Seng Alex Vang Email: sengv@hndinc.org
or direct: (559) 473-3884

About the Authors
Seng Alex Vang is HND Conference Co-chair and a K-12 educator in Fresno.

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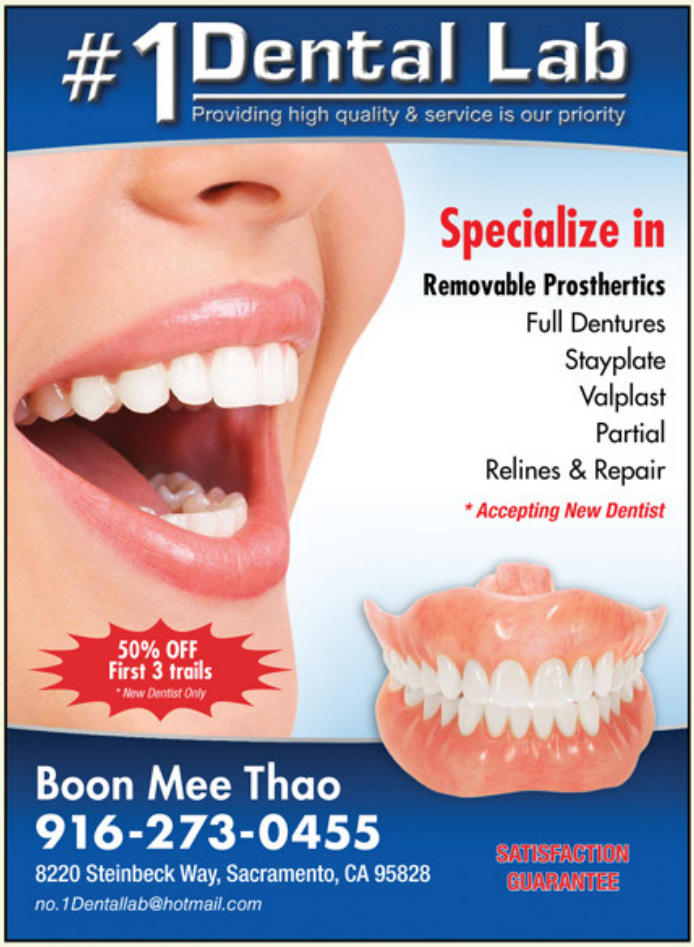
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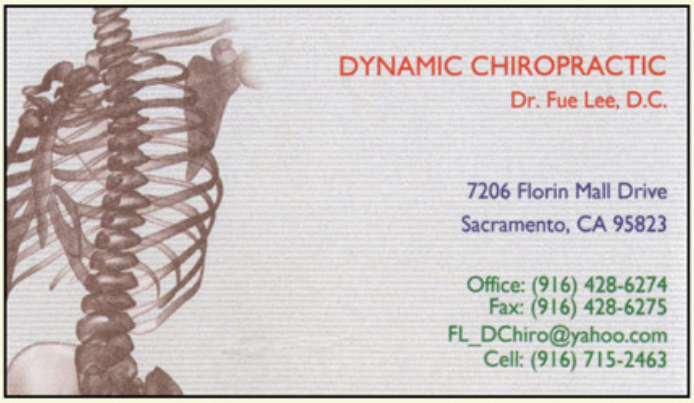
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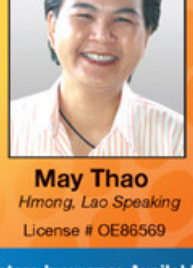
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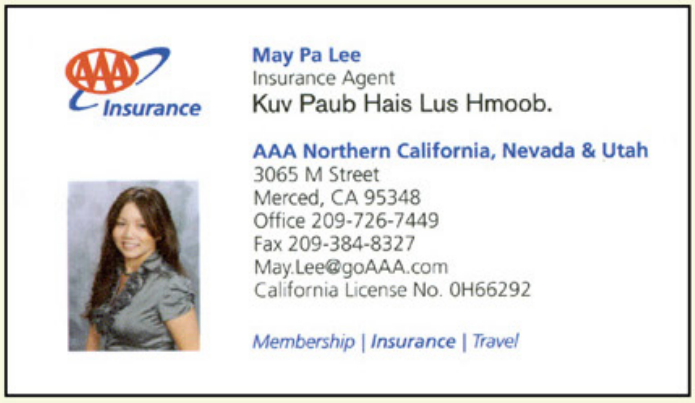
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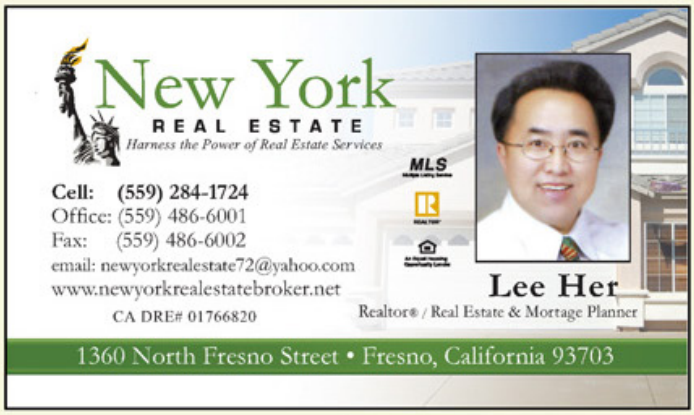
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**(559) 486-4324**

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**Dr. Long Thao, MD**
700 W Olive Ave Ste A
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**(559) 255-6476**

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**(559) 226-6726**

**Ying Suen Kong,M.D. Internal Medicine**
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**FAX: (559) 438-9088**

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**(559) 268-5030**

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**(559) 439-3204**

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Fresno, CA 93702
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**(559) 453-0709**

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**(559) 255-2510**

**Pho 75 #2**
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**(559) 497-9261**

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**(559) 389-0025**

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**(559) 264-9025**

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**Tang Dynasty**
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Fresno, CA 93726
**(559) 222-9181**

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7240 E. Southgate Dr Ste F
Sacramento, CA 95823
**(916) 424-8784**

**Asian Business Institute & Resource Center (ABIRC)**
7035 N. Fruit Ave
Fresno, CA 93711
**(559) 438-9680**

**Center for Asian-American Media**
145 Ninth St Ste 350
San Francisco, CA 94103
**(415) 863-0814**

**Center for Multi-Cultural Cooperation Hmong Voices**
Ue Yang
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Fresno, CA 93729
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**(559) 487-1500**

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**(559) 255-8395**

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**(209) 743-3340**

**Hmong American Assn. Inc.**
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Marysville, CA 95901
**(530) 749-1580**

**Hmong American Community, Inc.**
Pheng Lee
1044 Fulton Mall Ste 207
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**Hmong Women's Heritage Assoc.**
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**Southeast Asian Assistance Center**
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**Southeast Asian Community Center**
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**(559) 252-5566**

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**Hmong Alliance Fellowship**
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**(559) 225-5809**

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**(209) 937-9874**

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**Hmong Comm. Alliance Church**
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**The Crossing Community Church**
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**(559) 367-8079**

**Trinity Christian Headquarters**
Rev. Konghtxoujh Mitt Moua
1028 P Street
Sanger, CA 93657
**(559) 876-9075**
www.tch12.org

**Trinity Hmong Baptist Mission**
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**(209) 464-5077**

**United Church Liberty Evangelical**
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**(586) 756-1916**

**First Hmong Baptist Church**
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**(810) 757-7471**

**Hmong American Baptist Church**
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**Salvation Hmong Baptist Mission**
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**Hmong Alliance Church**
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**(763) 757-2616**

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Minneapolis, MN 55448
**(763) 754-7882**

**Hmong American Alliance**
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**(651) 765-2443**

**St. Paul Hmong Alliance Church**
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Saint Paul, MN 55117
**(651) 774-7955**

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**(920) 832-1210**

**Hmong Alliance Church**
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**Hmong All. Church of CMA**
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**(920) 832-1310**

**Hmong Alliance Church of Stevens Point Inc.**
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Stevens Point, WI 54481
**(715) 346-0080**

**Hmong Christian Community United Methodist Church**
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**Hmong Christian Ref. Church**
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**(920) 458-1710**

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**Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations**
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**Hmong American Association, Inc.**
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**(530) 415-8616**

**Hmong International New Year, Inc.**
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**Lao Family Community of Fresno, Inc.**
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**Lao Family Community Empowerment Inc.**
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**Fax: (209) 466-6567**

**Lao Family Community of Minnesota, Inc.**
July 4th Tournament & New Year
320 University Ave
St. Paul, MN 55103
**T: (651) 221-0069**
**C: (651) 216-5790**

**Lao Hmong Family Association of San Diego**
2757 Ulric St
San Diego, CA 92111

**Lao Veterans of America Institute**
Veterans Memorial Services
711 S. Minnewawa Ave
Fresno, CA 93727
**(559) 252-3561**

**Merced Lao Family Community, Inc**
855 West 15th Street
Merced, CA 95340
**(209) 384-7384**

**Oroville Hmong New Year (Laos Veteran)**
1252 12th St
Oroville, CA 95965

**Sacramento Hmong New Year, Inc.**
Lance Fang
P.O. Box 232118
Sacramento, CA 95823
**(916) 821-4576**

**Association Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota**
Ly Vang
1518 E. Lake Street, Suite 209
Minneapolis, MN 55407-1750
**(612) 724-3066**

**Center for Hmong Arts & Talent**
Kathy Mouachupao
995 University Avenue, Suite 220
St. Paul, MN 55104
**(651) 603-6971**

**East Side Hmong Association**
Fong Cha
328 Avenue Northeast
Carnation, WA 98014
**(425) 333-4393**

**Eau Claire Hmong MAA**
423 Wisconsin St
Eau Claire, WI 54703
**(715) 832-8420**

**Freedom, Inc.**
Kabzuaj Vaj
601 Bayview
Madison, WI 53715
**(608) 661-4098**

**Hmong American Center**
Thao Phia Xaykao
1032 W. Pioneer Parkway Ste 100
Arlington, TX 76013

**Hmong American Community Association, Inc.**
1421 N. Broadway Ste 116
Monomonie, WI 54751
**(715) 232-9350**

**Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association**
1718 Washington Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55411
**(612) 374-2694**

**Hmong American Association of South Carolina**
Harry Moua
507 Foster Grove Rd
Chesnee, SC 29323

**Hmong American Association of Portage County**
Mai Khou Yang
101 Division Street, N. Ste E
Stevens Point, WI 54481
**(715) 341-3703**
hmong_am_assoc@sbcglobal.net

**Hmong American Partnership (Main Branch)**
1075 Arcade St
St. Paul, MN 55106
**(651) 495-9160**

**Hmong American Partnership - Fox Valley**
2198 S. Memorial Dr
Appleton, WI 54915
**(920) 739-3192**

**Hmong American Partnership - Minneapolis**
1121 Glenwood Avenue, North
Minneapolis, MN 55405
**(612) 377-6482**

**Hmong American Partnership - St. Paul**
430 Dale Street
St. Paul, MN 55103
**(651) 291-1811**

**Hmong American Women's Association**
Christa Xiong
2414 West Vliet Street
Milwaukee, WI 53205
**(414) 342-0858**

**Hmong/American Friendship Association, Inc.**
Lo Neng Kiatoukaysy
3824 West Vliet Street
Milwaukee, WI 53208
**(414) 344-6575**

**Hmong Association of Green Bay, Inc.**
200 S. Ashland Ave
Green Bay, WI 54303
**(920) 437-4550**

**Hmong Association of Wood County, Inc.**
Xou Khang
1430 2nd Street N.
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494
**(715) 424-4981**

**Hmong Community of Metro-Detroit, Inc.**
P.O. Box 3810
Centerline, MI 48015
**(586) 945-0868**

**Hmong Cultural Center**
995 University Ave Ste 214
Saint Paul, MN 55104
**(651) 917-9937**

**Hmong Educational Advancement, Inc.**
2414 W. Vliet Street
Milwaukee, WI 53205
Ge Xiong
**(414) 931-8834**

**Hmong-Lao American Association, Inc.**
Za Teng Thao
316 Court Street
Oshkosh, WI 54901-5032
**(920) 235-5133**

**Hmong-Lao Assistance Association, Inc.**
Catherine Hodges
124 Logan Drive
Mount Gilead, NC 27306
**(910) 439-9533**

**Hmong Minnesota Pacific Association**
925 Payne Ave Ste B
St. Paul, MN 55101
**(651) 778-8937**

**Hmong Mutual Assistance Association of Sheboygan, Inc.**
Chasong Yang
2304 Superior Ave
Sheboygan, WI 53081
**(920) 458-0808**
hmaas@powercom.net

**Hmong National Development**
1628 16th St NW
Washington, DC 20009
**(202) 588-1661**

**Hmong National Organization, Inc.**
501 Dale St North Ste 106
St. Paul, MN 55103
**(651) 290-2343**

**Hmong United Association of Rhode Island**
340 Lockwood Street
Providence, RI 02907
**(401) 455-0847**

**IRCO - Asian Family Center**
Lee Po Cha
4424 NE Glisan Street
Portland, OR 97213
**(503) 235-9396**

**La Crosse Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association, Inc.**
Dennis Tucker
2615 George Street
La Crosse, WI 54603
**(608) 781-5744**

**Lao-Hmong American Coalition**
Yang Chee
7051 Beacon Way
Westminster, CO 80030
**(303) 429-8724**

**Lao Family Community of Minnesota – Minneapolis**
320 W. University Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55103
**(651) 221-0069**

**Lao Family Community of Minnesota – St. Paul**
1433 E. Franklin Ave
Minneapolis, MN 55404
**(612) 870-1719**

**Lao Family of Milwaukee**
2331 W. Vieau Pl
Milwaukee, WI 53204
**(414) 385-3380**

**Lauj Youth Society**
Sonja Mee Lor
995 University Avenue, Suite 213
St. Paul, MN 55104
**(651) 644-2446**

**Southeast Asian Community Council**
Cha Lee
555 Girard Terrace North
Minneapolis, MN 55405
**(612) 342-1530**

**Southeast Asian Resource Center**
1628 16th St. NW 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20009
**(202) 667-4690**

**United Hmong Association, Inc.**
P.O. Box 9683
Hickory, NC 28603-9683
**(828) 465-6288**

**United Hmong Comm. Center**
401 9th St
Green Bay, WI 54304
**(920) 432-8900**

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## EUROASIAN HEALTH CENTER

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VALUE COUPON

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# FREE DRINK*

## Asia SUPERMARKET International Market, LLC

** with purchase of a combination plate @ $5.99 (drink is 12oz. can)*

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VALUE COUPON

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## Asia SUPERMARKET International Market, LLC

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VALUE COUPON

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## Golden Bowl SUPER ASIAN MARKET

Your Next Purchase

** No minimum purchase. Excludes Rice.*

1221 N. First St. • Fresno, CA 93701 • (559) 485-5593

Limit one coupon per customer per service. May not be combined with any other offer. Taxes not included. No cash value. No substitutions. Void if copied or transferred. **Expires 12/2013**

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With new car purchase. Must present coupon. May not be combined with any other offer. Taxes not included. No cash value. No substitutions. Void if copied or transferred. **Expires 12/2013**

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# FREE 1ST OIL CHANGE

## Selma HONDA

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With new car purchase. Must present coupon. May not be combined with any other offer. Taxes not included. No cash value. No substitutions. Void if copied or transferred. **Expires 12/2013**

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# Hmong Music Festival Brings It Altogether

**Over 14 Hmong bands and 13 solo singers, from all over the states, performed at the Paul Paul Theater at the Fresno Fair for the first ever Hmong Music Festival (HMF).**

By: Nu Vang

Artists from all the way in North Carolina such as Reflections to singer Proto-J in California were out there showcasing the many songs that fans have listened to for years. The music genre ranged from metal rock to pop music, offering something for everyone.

*Txhawb was able to sit down with the masterminds, Tou Lee Chang and Xeng Xai Xiong, who created HMF under their company AZN LIVE, and talk about how they got started and how it was to coordinate a festival this size.*

**Txhawb: How did you both come up with the idea of HMF?**

Tou: Well, I think that the concept for HMF is not something that is new. In terms of the industry, it is something that is really standard since there are music festivals throughout the nation in the year. But in terms of the Hmong community, we just haven't seen something like this before. So what we did was bring something that was standard in the industry into the Hmong community.

Xeng: Right when Tou and I started HMF, so many other people said 'Oh you know, I have thought of that idea already. I have wanted to do that for a long time ago." But no one actually took the time and effort to pull one together. So I think the most important part about HMF is that we were able to actually make it happen. So that is why it is such an exciting event.

**Txhawb: How do you feel about HMF now, after all the process and seeing the finish product?**

Tou: We made it. I think that we actually feel proud that the whole event has been done through our very young team. Even when we had lot of individuals out there that did not believe in us. But we made it. I think that a lot of the current audiences are making a lot of the movements, and I think we have the strength to make it happen. At the end of the day, it isn't about trying to break and make a profit but trying to make a movement. It is about trying to really make something unique in the community.

Xeng: It was the collaboration at the end with the event, which for myself made me feel that our Hmong people do long for the same things as other races. We do want that help and support from each other. The purpose that we were able to fulfill was that music brings everyone together and the collaboration shows it. When the artists started to sing, everyone started to sing along with them. This was a big accomplishment that although we just promoted music, we made a big impact. After the event, we start to hear the music being played in the radio, or even when we go to the Hmong stores. It is quite an accomplishment but there are still many things that we need to improve on.

**Txhawb: A lot of people do different festivals, whether costume festivals or a certain holiday festival. Why did you choose Hmong music?**

Tou: The whole idea before I even improved it with Xeng, and we started to do the whole HMF. I myself, personally am not a musician but I










have for a long time been very passionate about doing something unique for the community. Through my research, I found out that music is really something that we are lacking on and people had not found the right solution for it. So I continue my research as to how artists such as Lady Gaga become Lady Gaga or Justin Beiber become Justin Beiber. They got the support through the music festival. So I thought maybe in order to revive the Hmong music market, we needed something to revive our artists. So I took the concept of main stream American festival, and brought it to the Hmong community and hopefully it works.

**Txhawb: So then you guys are not musicians at all then?**

Tou: No. It's funny how a friend was saying that I guess because we are not musicians, that is why we are able to pull it through. We are already trying to pull the event together and if we are trying to get ready to go on the stage, then we can't focus on it. What we are realizing in the past is that a lot of the individuals that have always wanted to make a movement are artists themselves. So the challenge at the same time is that they are pulling the event together but then they have to prepare for their show. So Xeng Xai and I, we created our company called AZN LIVE and basically we want to specialize in event planning and the logistic aspect. We are not musicians but we are here to specialize in that core planning process that makes great events for our Hmong musicians.

Xeng: Yes, just as how Tou has said. In our music industry, we lack a lot of key players. If you look at the mainstream, they have the agent, the band, and they have the agencies that promote the bands. In our Hmong industry though, we still rely on those bands to put on their own concerts. There is no one there to promote for them. There is still that struggle there, so the concert does not have the wow effect because if they spent time on this, then they don't have time to practice or they do not have the budget to have a production big enough. Our industry lacks those key players. At AZN LIVE, we are a key player in the music industry, and although we are not musicians, we are the production part and fill in the void in it.

**Txhawb: Compared to all the other concerts, what did you want to happen at HMF that would be different?**

Tou: What we realized about the concerts is they are more a dancing type then about the music. But at the HMF, we provide an environment for people to appreciate music, to really take the chance to value the artist and see their performance and like the music. That is what we wanted to do it differently, and why our main stage and seating style you can really get into the music and you know the lyrics. We had a lot of audience at HMF that after the event, they went right back into listening to Hmong music. So it's pretty amazing. All my little nephews and cousins they listen to a lot of our artists that we brought to the event.

**Txhawb: That is pretty cool, it is like a domino effect. You are reinforcing the music again.**

Tou: Yeah, you know it has a lot of positive effect on individuals.

**Txhawb: With HMF, how many people were in attendance?**

Tou: We estimated about 3,500. We wanted a lot more then that but I think that it is fairly good for a first year event. The most amazing thing that I always wanted to bring up is that it is not about the total number but the actual impact that we were able to bring is that we attracted people from 7 different states and not only that but from 37 cities from California. The way we tracked that was we sold online tickets, and so people by their tickets they have to enter their zip code. We had people buying













tickets from Montana, Wisconsin, and Colorado. It was all the way from Los Angeles, San Diego, Chico to Cresent City. So it's not about Fresno that is moving into HMF, but we are starting to build that momentum.

**Txhawb: I was surprised when I hear you had so many different bands. How did you go about inviting all of them?**

Xeng: I think that is the challenge that we all had. Even the people in the past, we all go through it, that's why events like this do not happen because there are so many steps and things you have to do in order to bring in this many bands. At HMF, I might not be able to tell you the secret. *laughs* But for us, it is very simple. We go online, and we did a lot of research. We went on Facebook and all over just trying to contact the Hmong bands. One thing about Hmong bands is that it is so hard to try and get their response. When you email a request to them, it takes two to three weeks for them to respond back. That is quite a challenge working with an artist.

**Txhawb: What made you choose one band compared to another one?**

Xeng: For HMF team, we research the different types of band and what genre or music do they do. If they have made an impression in the Hmong community or have they established or are they a new and rising band. Basically, HMF is a platform for the new and rising bands because they need the fans. As for the established band, many people already know about them, but when they come to perform, people want to come and see and listen to them.

**Txhawb: So I hear there will be another one next year. What will you improve or add on to HMF 2013.**

Tou: I think that the details information we will try and surprise the audiences. But the main focus is to continue and improve the quality of the performance. The thing that differentiates us from other promoters, is that the artists come and perform at HMF has to be unique.

Xeng: To give you an example of that, you do see Proto-J has performed before. Jade Lee has performed before but what they put on at HMF was something different. As for Proto-J, he brought in his whole dance crew and that is something new for him too. As for Pagnia Xiong, that was something new for her. She has never done that before and had any background dancer before. So these are the things and ideas that we want to find and implement to their performance so that they are even better than the last time.

**Txhawb: Can you give me a sneak peak of what to look for next year? Is there something different that you will be providing next year?**

Xeng: For now we do not know which bands we will be working directly with, but as far as production wise, for sure we will have better lights and better sound quality for next year. Not only that but a better experience over all for our bands.

Tou: I do want one thing that last year we did forget about in another aspect of music. Next year, we will focus a little more on the DJ experience. What we realize is that a DJ is actually considered a musician. So be excited, it isn't going to be the traditional DJing at the club.

HMF 2012 was an all-day event where audiences listened to a wide range of musicians throughout the day and into the dark night.

Not only was there music, but there was the REVIVED fashion show as well. Through their clothing creations, designers were able to express their styles and message.

If you missed out on this year's festival, you have HMF 2013 to look forward to and perhaps much more.




# Victor K. Vue

txhawb profile

"Success is not really about money, it is about accomplishments," says Victor Nengkosyeng Vue, "it requires hard work, good customer service, and honesty." When Victor arrived in the US in 1987 with his wife and kids, mother, brother and three sisters, he knew immediately that education was the key to success. Having previously learned Lao, Thai, and English in the schools in the Ban Vinai Camp, he already had a foundation to build on. He went on to learn what success was through his trials and failures.

Victor received his high school diploma from Tulare Adult School and a paralegal certificate from the College of the Sequoias. He continued his education at Fresno State, graduating in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in Linguistics and minor in English. Victor intended to pursue law school but while studying for the LSAT, he realized that the field of Law was not for him. He sought a career choice that would be more fitting, testing out the field by taking a job interpreting Hmong and Lao for AT&T, the first job to ever provide medical benefits for his family. However, Victor still was not content. His dream was to one day own his own business. He decided to take up jobs selling life insurance as an independent agent, and running an office for paralegal services.

During this exploratory phase of Victor's life, he was recruited by North American Mortgage to be a loan officer. This position jump-started his career in the real estate industry. Victor went on to earn his real estate broker license and started his own real estate company called "Sawmtxiaj" Sherchia Reality. As a business, "Sawmtxiaj" Sherchia Reality's philosophy is customer satisfaction comes first and that every client should be treated fairly.

As ambitious an entrepreneur Victor is, he is also an ardent donor. Victor has sponsored Fresno Fire and Police Crime Departments, Hmong Associations, and events. He has also helped sponsor the Hmong New Year pageants, and contributed money to families experiencing tragedies. His favorite and most memorable involvement was having helped coordinate for General Vang Pao's funeral. Leading by example, Victor hopes more Hmong individuals will take an interest in business. "Hmong media and associations should promote successful leaders and business owners. Positive exposure will encourage the Hmong community to strive for prosperity."

writer
Andre Yang

photography
Kao Lee

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txhawb profile

# Dr. Lon Yaj, D.C.

writer
Elezanbee Vue

photography
Tudor Stanley

Dr. Lon Looj Yaj D.C.

New Life
Chiropractic

2254 N Fresno St
Fresno, CA 93703

559.283.8853

At 10 years of age, Dr. Lon Looj Yaj caught pneumonia, an experience that would shape his entire life path. He knew then that he "wanted to help others get better." He eventually decided upon chiropractic healing and decided becoming a chiropractor would allow him to best help others. In 2000, Dr. Yaj earned an A.S. in Math and Science, and an A.A. in Liberal Studies from American River College. He pushed on to San Francisco State, where he finished his Bachelors of Science in Cell Molecular Biology B.S. degree. From there he attended Life West Chiropractor College and received his Doctorate of Chiropractic degree.

There have been sacrifices along the way, but Dr. Yaj is grateful for his supportive family, especially his parents. In fact, Dr. Yaj's father taught him the meaning of sacrifice. Dr. Yaj recalls his father working "long hours away from home, only coming home once a month", instilling into him the values of prioritizing, and sacrificing at the present moment while aiming for greater goals that might have more time or effort to achieve. He is glad he followed his father's advice to "sacrifice/suffer now and have a great life later." His mother, meticulous in her "love and care, always made sure we were fed and dressed for school." Because of this he concludes, "Life couldn't be any better."

When asked how he defines "Success", Dr. Yaj answers, "Being successful doesn't mean to have money; it means that your goals have been achieved." For years now he has been enjoying in his success, having achieved his goals of helping others with chiropractic services. In fact, he doesn't even consider what he is doing as "work." His clientele base is steadily blooming via referrals, a testament to his dedication to "each individual patient to improve his or her health and condition." Along with his accomplishments, Dr. Yaj is proud of his generous sponsorships of various Hmong organizations, banquets and functions.

Throughout his years of studying and working to heal the community, Dr. Yaj has learned that what the elders say is true, "the older you get, the wiser you are." Knowledge and Wisdom takes time to gather, but it does so steadily, as it has with the burgeoning group of successful, well-educated Hmong people in the community. Dr. Yaj encourages the Hmong youth to utilize those pools of knowledge for their own advancement, because anyone "can accomplish anything with determination and commitment as long as they don't give up."



# Kou T. Xiong

txhawb profile

"To me success is achieving one's set goal regardless how small or whatever that goal is. I'm a big believer in setting goals," says Sacramento-based attorney Kou Travis Xiong. And Kou has lived a life of experiences that align with these words.

Kou vividly recalls a challenge he faced after his 8th grade year. Kou scored high enough on a high school placement exam to be placed in advanced courses. However, the high school vice principal intervened and instead enrolled him in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Understanding the high importance of elite colleges placed on the rigor of high school courses and a student's grade in those courses in the admissions process and having a strong desire to attend the best universities in the world, Kou and his parents confronted the vice principal and demanded to have him enroll in the appropriate honors courses. The vice principal refused and threw every imaginable obstacle at them. But with Kou's persistence, the vice principal conditionally gave in but required Kou's father to sign a waiver releasing the vice principal from any responsibilities should Kou fail in the honors courses. This discriminatory experience motivated Kou and it helped to solidify his belief that success requires not only having goals but also strong conviction.

Challenged by the rigor of the advanced college preparatory courses, inspired, and motivated, in part by the vice principal incident, Kou went on to graduate near the top of his high school class and earned essentially a full ride to one of the most prestigious colleges in the world, the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a minor in Asian American Studies with an emphasis in law. Committed to his passion for the law, Kou went on to attend law school at the University of Idaho College of Law. While in law school, Kou handled misdemeanor trials and appeals, as well as family law cases, through the law school's clinical programs. Following that, he worked as a hearing representative for the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, then as a Staff Attorney for the State Compensation Insurance Fund, and later entered the private sector at a large, state-wide law firm, called Grancell, Lebovitz, et al, defending big corporate business and insurance giants, such as AIG, American Airlines and Wells Fargo Bank. After several years in private practice, Kou returned to work for the State of California as a Senior Attorney representing the State in complex class action litigations involving civil rights, constitutional laws, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. In May of 2012, Kou opened his own law office.

In addition to his full-time jobs, Kou set aside time to be active in the community. Among his many community activities, he served as the General Counsel of the Hmong American Ad Hoc Committee of Sacramento, which organized and rallied against the arrests of the late General Vang Pao and eleven other Hmong leaders. Currently, Kou is the President of the Board of Directors of the Urban Charter Schools Collective (UCSC), a not-for-profit organization that manages and operates the first Hmong independent public charter school, Yav Pem Suab Academy, which he helped to establish, in Sacramento, California.

In the future, Kou would like to be a part of the establishment of a successful Hmong Chamber of Commerce or a professional Hmong business network not only in California but throughout the world. Discussing what he envisions for the betterment of the Hmong community, he states that "we must move away from the politics of the older generations and forge a future based on solid foundations of respect, trust, professionalism, and integrity." With the increasing number of educated Hmong Americans, Kou strongly believes "the future of the Hmong, not only in America but all over the world, will be brighter and more exciting." Kou says that one of his life's goals now, which he promises, is "to play a big role in shaping that future."

writer
Andre Yang

photography
Lue Vang

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txhawb profile

# Lee Her

Even as a successful Real Estate Services entrepreneur, when Lee Her thinks about his arrival from the Thai refugee camp to Portland, Oregon in 1980, he recalls three things: being 14 years of age, possessing no education, and having deeply missed his sisters, brothers and parents left behind in Laos. Being without parents, he spent his late teens and early twenties juggling high school with part time jobs, and eventually had to take on a full time job while in college.

writer
Elezanbee Vue

photography
Tudor Stanley

Lee Her

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Lifewest Insurance
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Lee didn't let these hardships stop him. He went on to earn a Business Operations B.S. degree then worked for over 17 years as an independent life insurance agent. He has since expanded into the real estate field, launching up his own company, New York Real Estate. Lee is also licensed and provides financial services and insurance through his other company Lifewest Insurance Solutions. But the success of his real estate company now demands the majority of his time.

"People know me very well in the Hmong Community" Lee says, because he "provides the best in quality service to people regardless of education, class, age, gender or background." Lee's attitude, integrity, and efficiency set his company apart from others. "I love real estate", Lee says, "I get to help people buy homes, work my own schedule, be my own boss, and have free time to spend with my friends and family." Not only does Lee own a successful real estate company, he has hosted his own radio talk shows (KMPO 88.7 FM/KBIF 900 AM/KQEQ 1210 AM) for the last 15 years. Lee has worked with various non-profit organizations, making donations in support of Hmong candidates running for office, and holds a position on the Board of Directors for Hmong Business Association. Lee ultimately hopes to grow his real estate company business into a nationwide real estate and life insurance company and hopes to leave a legacy for his family and many generations to come.

As busy as he keeps himself, he never forgets to consider the future. He stresses that "we need to be more open to new ideas and networks to help provide more resources for our people." More importantly, Lee invites fellow Hmong leaders and business owners to collaborate in sharing their stories successes and failures with the younger Hmong generation. Being a living example, Lee still struggles with the English language, but his accomplishments are evidence that anyone with the drive and motivation to succeed can achieve anything they want.



# Max & Grace Lee

txhawb profile

Having begun their work in the real estate and mortgage industry in 1995, husband and wife team, Max and Grace Lee have built their career on drive and passion. Grace began by working as a loan officer at First Union where her rapport with clientele and excellent performance won her a number of "Employee of the Month" awards. Max began his work with Century 21 Real Estate. He served the Sacramento, Stockton, Elk Grove, and Chico area. There, he immediately excelled and earned the "Top Agent Producer" award for every year he was with the company. He later took his experience with him to First American Realty where his knowledge and talent led him to be appointed a real estate trainer.

The two find great self-satisfaction in helping people purchase homes, so eventually they opened their own brokerage in order to better cater their own style of services to best help their clientele. Max Real Estate Investment quickly became one of the leading residential brokerages in Northern California. Throughout the years, Max has moderated numerous panels for the Central Valley real estate community, including a recent panel addressing the rising defaults, and foreclosure in residential and commercial real estate. This active presence in the real estate industry helps them stay on top of their game, and maintain their success. Currently, Max is also the Chief Economist for the Hmong Lee USA organization, where he provides analysis and gives strategic advice for business and economic growth.

Even with their business success, the couple makes time to help serve communities and contribute funds for education, while making their family unit a priority. Deriving inspiration from their four children, the two aim always to "motivate others to work with you in bringing about the success you want to have." The couple believes in "leaving the world better than we found it. And that by helping others achieve success, we set examples for one another and our children."

While juggling their careers and family, Grace and Max believe that there are definite ways the Hmong American community can improve. There is a significant portion of our community that lives at or below the poverty level. The couple believes we can come together to educate our community's understanding of the problems, and collectively seek solutions. By promoting education, leadership, and positive role models, which will lead our being a more prosperous whole. "There is a lot of work to do but it can be done."

writer
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photography
Lue Vang

Max & Grace Lee

Max Real Estate
Investment

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txhawb profile

# Prestige Life

"We have leaders with passion helping people with dreams", says Shone Yang the Chairman of Prestige Life. Prestige is in the business of marketing the American dream. For the right person, Prestige is the greatest business opportunity in the world. Prestige is an independent marketing company that offers you a chance to be in business for yourself but not by yourself. Prestige has powerful financial concepts and services to help families take charge of their financial future. It represents some of the top ten world-class product providers in the United States. Prestige founders are Shone Yang, Mitch Herr, Xou Fang, Billy Vang, Sunshine Quinn, and Teng Fang.

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photography
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Prestige
Life Insurance
Solutions

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Fresno, CA 93727

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What set Prestige apart from other companies are their MISSION, VISION, and CRUSADE. The Prestige's mission is to help families accumulate wealth and ensure proper protection. Their vision is to change the saving habits of families. Their crusade is to educate and inform families about the "truth of money". These three key ingredients are behind the Prestige's success. In addition, Prestige has a duplicable Business Format System which provides the blueprint for success. "Prestige is created by associates for associates...", says Mitch Herr. You can build a nationwide business with Prestige. You can truly build a business for yourself with 100% ownership from day one. You will continue to receive residual income even when you're no longer a part of Prestige. Through the Prestige opportunity, you have the freedom and power to create your own future. Prestige and Associates have expanded their business throughout the nation including: California, Minnesota, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Colorado.

Within the past five years, Prestige has shown its commitment to support the community by fundraising for and donating to many local organizations such as the Hmong International New Year Foundation Inc., the United Hmong Council Inc., Healing Hope, Inc., the CSU Fresno Hmong Student Association, various high school sports teams, as well as supporting many local and state political leaders. In the future, Prestige anticipates to offer scholarship for higher education as well as other initiatives to help our youth stay competitive and excel.

To the founders of Prestige, "success means (1) knowing exactly what you want in life, (2) turn them into goals, (3) developing a plan to achieve those goals by taking immediate action, (4) never give up your dreams and goals, and (5) becoming a good steward by helping others." They believe achieving one's goals is as important as helping others achieve their goals. "Being a good steward is not just about giving money, but more importantly is about sharing and teaching others to become successful in life as well", says Mitch Herr. Prestige believes that Hmong business owners and leaders have a great responsibility not only to our individual families but to our community at large. Business and community leaders need to work in harmony to achieve the goals of Peace and Prosperity for our people. Prestige and its Associates are dedicated to providing financial resources and a risk-free opportunity for people who want to be their own boss and have control over their own destiny.




# Dr. Vong Yang, D.C.

txhawb profile

When Dr. Vong Yang's family came to the United States, he was only 15 years old. That same year, his father was involved in an automobile accident that left him in severe pain. His father sought treatment from a chiropractor to ease the pain, which was the first time Vong was exposed to the chiropractic field. He became immediately fascinated by how chiropractors utilized an alternative treatment to herbal medicines or prescribed medications for pain. When his father responded positively to the treatments and had no side effects, Vong made up his mind to one day become a chiropractor himself. Now, having become a chiropractor himself and owning his own business, he is very gratified that he was able to put his education, life lessons and commitment into practice.

"I had my fair share of subjects that came easily to me and subjects that took more effort," Vong says, admirably discussing his struggles in school. Still, he battled onward in these courses alongside his struggle with the English language. "I always reminded myself that I had a goal I always had hope that with effort, courage, and purpose, I could achieve something beyond my imagination. Therefore, I never gave up." Vong graduated from Clovis West High School, then spent his undergraduate years at Fresno City College and California State University, Fresno. His decision to move to the bay area to attend Life Chiropractic College West was made with a heavily weighted conscience of the impacts on his father and family.

This definition of love and support that Vong and his father share is something Vong passes on to the community. Dr. Vong has donated both time and money to a number of Hmong agencies, individuals, and events that have asked for financial support. "It is very important that Hmong business owners give back to the community. We must all support one another in order for the Hmong community to grow as a whole." As a chiropractor, his work never stops; choosing instead to commit himself beyond work hours to nurture his business and remain connected to help ease the physical pain of others. He has used is chiropractic healing to help many people in the community, and their numerous referrals of friends and family to his office has defined his success.

writer
Andre Yang

photography
Tudor Stanley

Dr. Vong Yang, D.C.

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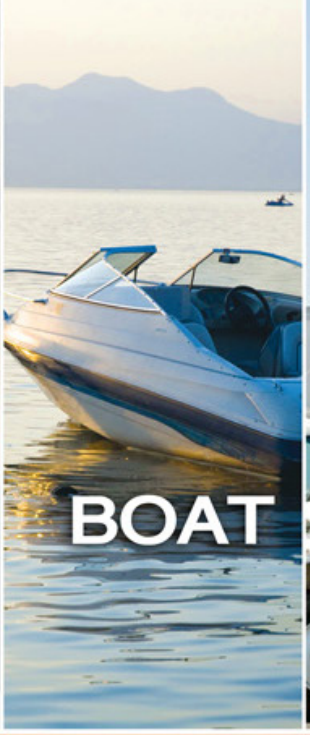
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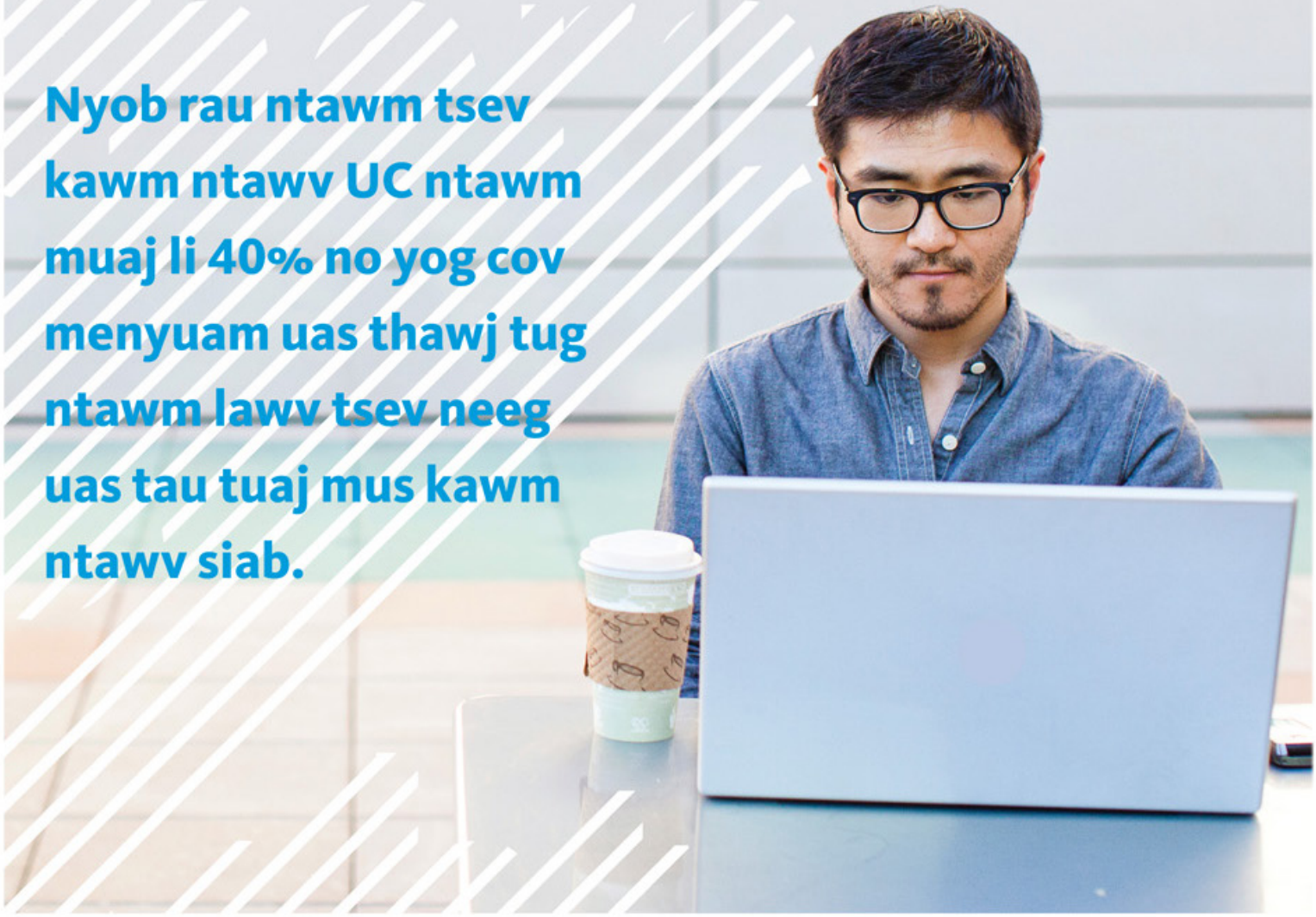
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