

Smithsonian to showcase history of Indian American community



Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program Director Franklin Odo announces the exploratory phase of Smithsonian Indian American project at a briefing with reporters on Oct. 11, 2007, in the Capital Gallery in Washington, D.C. Below left to right, Nitya Venkataraman, Sarita Venkat, Toby Chaudhuri, Francey Youngberg, Franklin Odo, Aziz Haniffa, Ishani Chowdhury and Simran Chawla.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 11, 2007) – Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program Director Franklin Odo today kicked-off an exploratory phase for a major project to showcase Indian American history and experiences at the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum and research complex. Odo made the announcement with Indian American community leaders this morning at a news conference at the Capital Gallery, inviting others to weigh in so the Smithsonian can solicit input and gauge support.

The project, called HomeSpun: Made In The U.S.A., seeks to establish a permanent presence at the Smithsonian dedicated to the history, achievements and contributions of America's rapidly growing Indian American population. HomeSpun will chronicle the immigration of Indians to this country and point to the impact and contributions they

have made in diverse fields like medicine, engineering, technology, education, culture, the arts, media and politics.

Odo pointed out that the Smithsonian dedicated a special section for Sikh Americans and their contributions to American society in an exhibit 3-years ago, but HomeSpun strives to be a much larger project about a broader Indian American experience.

"There are millions of Indian Americans, but the story of their struggle and emergence in this country is largely unknown to the general public," said Odo at today's news conference. "It's time to tell the story of the people of India who have made their home in America for more than two centuries."

Working with the Smithsonian, Indian American community leaders Parag Mehta and Toby Chaudhuri have formed a working group to help make this dream a reality.

Mehta and Chaudhuri joined Odo at today's news conference optimistic that there will be considerable community support for the effort.

HomeSpun plans to include a national traveling exhibition, related public programming at the Smithsonian, a dedicated website and a middle school curriculum guide for the Smithsonian's young visitors, depending on the availability of materials and funds. The entire project will be made available to the 24 million visitors who come to the Smithsonian every year and nearly 100 million other visitors online.

"This is our time. It's time to tell our American story," said Toby Chaudhuri, Indian American community leader. "We must know where we came from to know where we're going. It's hard to think of a more credible or more well-known institution than the Smithsonian to tell this story." ■

"Gandhi of Sri Lanka" brings his message of peace on America visit

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 24, 2007) – Sri Lanka's apostle of peace was in Washington last month. Wherever he traveled, American people and the Sri Lankan community in the Washington D.C. area welcome Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne as a world leader. During his one-month U.S. Tour, Dr. Ari began his message of hope and peace at the Harvard Divinity School in Boston and travels across the country before visiting Hawaii.

In Washington, he spoke at the World Bank, the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, and the George Washington University.

For a half-century, Dr. Ari has kept a simple message of hope and compassion-in-action through the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. He said that human life is more than an ideology and our happiness is more than a reality show.

"I will never give up hope," he reiterated.

His idea of universal love and human freedom comes from the inspiring leaders of the world's largest and most powerful democracies: India and the United States. Dr. Ari, who is popularly



Former U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Shaun Donnelly and Sri Lankan Ambassador to the United States Bernard Goonatilake (left) welcome Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne at a George Washington University reception and lecture organized by Professor Patrick Mendis (right), vice president of academic affairs, Osgood Center for International Studies.

known as "the Gandhi of Sri Lanka," got his initial inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, who turned India's anger in to non-violence in search of freedom from Great Britain.

American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had shown him the power of peace march. President Jimmy Carter's

unending efforts for world peace and homebuilding gave him the hope.

Sarvodaya has integrated these tools of human values to uplift its people in more than 15,000

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House Passes China Resolution

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 29, 2007) – With Congressman David Wu's support, the U.S. House of Representatives today passed H. Con. Res. 234, a resolution calling on the People's Republic of China to stop the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees.

"As a defender of human rights around the world, I am committed to ensuring that individuals who have fled North Korea for its horrendous human rights conditions are protected," said Congressman

Wu. "China's practice of repatriating refugees, who face imprisonment, torture, or execution, must end."

H. Con. Res. 234 was introduced by Congressman Edward Royce (R-CA). The resolution recognizes that North Korea is a dictatorial regime that commits gross human rights violations against the North Korean people. The resolution also calls on the government of the People's Republic of China to honor its obligations under the United Nations Conventions

and Protocols relating to the status of refugees by (1) stopping the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees, (2) making genuine efforts to identify and protect refugees among North Korean migrants to China, and (3) granting the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights unfettered access to North Korean refugees in China.

Congressman Wu is a cosponsor of H. Con. Res. 234 and a member of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs. ■

Senate blocks DREAM Act debate

Congressman Mike Honda (CA-15), Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), expressed disappointment over last week's failure of the Senate to debate S. 2205, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2007 (DREAM Act). The related bill in the House of Representatives is H.R. 1275, the American Dream Act.

The bill would allow undocumented students who are long-time U.S. residents to pursue their dreams of going to college and to contribute to the well-being of our nation. Despite the fact that many of these children have grown up in the U.S., attended local schools, and have demonstrated a sustained commitment to succeed in the U.S. as Americans, our immigration laws provide no avenue for these students to become legal.

"I have met with DREAM Act students in my district, who are academic stars, contribute so much to the civic life at our schools and our communities, and have a rich understanding of American principles of social justice," said Honda. "It is a shame that the Senate has voted to give up on this talent and diversity. It is time to help these undocumented students who have grown up in American

with American values and the American dream. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House to address this issue."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi added that "By blocking action on the Dream Act, Senate Republicans prevented a critical first step to address our nation's broken immigration system."

"Our immigration system needs to honor the promise of America and recognize the enormous contributions that immigrants make to our nation," she said. "But it must do so in a way that makes our nation safer, protects all workers, and respects the rule of law."

The Asian American Justice Center (AAJC) is extremely disappointed that while a majority of Senators supported the DREAM Act, the 52 votes cast did not overcome the 60-vote threshold for today's procedural motion. There were 44 Senators who voted against giving talented immigrant youth a chance to fully contribute to this country.

"It is sad that so many of our law makers are willing to extinguish the dreams of young people who are willing to earn their right to stay in the country they call home by working hard in college or defending America in the military,"

said AAJC President and Executive Director Karen Narasaki. "Even though these immigrant students have done nothing wrong, the Senators who voted against today's motion want to punish them for being trapped in an immigration system the Senate refused to fix."

Last week, Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL), Chuck Hagel (R-NE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) re-introduced the DREAM Act as a new stand-alone bill, S. 2205. There are an estimated 65,000 students who graduate from high school every year without legal immigration status, including many Asian Americans. These students face a daily fear of deportation from the only country they know and many difficulties pursuing higher education or military service.

If made into law, the DREAM Act, which stands for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors, would only apply to individuals brought to the U.S. at least five years ago as children, who have grown up here, and who have remained in school and out of trouble. They could get a green card six years after graduating from high school if during that time they

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Profile of Vietnamese-Americans

By Mark E. Pfeifer, PhD

In September 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau released 2006 American Community Survey (ACS) figures for Vietnamese Americans. The ACS data are now being released annually. It should be noted that the survey is only given to a sample of the U.S. population as opposed to be administered to all U.S. households every 10 years. Despite this weakness, the availability of annual ACS data does provide for the first time a wealth of frequently updated data pertaining to racial, ethnic, and ancestral groups in the United States including Vietnamese-Americans.

The top 10 states for Vietnamese Americans according to the 2006 ACS were California (533,893), Texas (184,096), Washington (68,308), Florida (54,204), Virginia (48,729), Massachusetts (47,121), Georgia (44,830), New York (40,523), Pennsylvania (35,004), and Arizona (26,308). The total estimated Vietnamese population in

the U.S. according to the 2006 ACS was 1,599,394.

The 2006 ACS estimates that the median age of Vietnamese-Americans was 34.1 years (compared to about 36 years among all Americans). The average size of Vietnamese-American households was 3.40 persons compared to 2.6 among the entire U.S. population. The divorce rate among the Vietnamese-American population was 5.5% compared to more than 10% among all Americans over 15 years of age. According to the 2006 ACS figures, the percentage of Vietnamese Americans with a Bachelor's Degree was 18.8% compared to 17.1% among the entire American population. The 2006 ACS figures show that more than 53% of foreign-born Vietnamese arrived in the U.S. after 1990 while around 46% of the population came to the U.S. before this time.

Around 84% of Vietnamese-Americans reported speaking a language other than English at home. In addition, the 2006 ACS figures show the largest concentration of

employed Vietnamese-American adults (around 30%) working in Management, Professional and Related Occupations. The enumerated 2006 ACS data put the median Vietnamese-American family income at \$56,186, close to the U.S. average of \$58,000. The poverty rate among Vietnamese-American families was 11.3%, compared to the U.S. average of 9.8%. According to the 2006 ACS, around 68% of Vietnamese-Americans resided in owner-occupied housing units, while 32% of the population lived in renter-occupied housing. The enumerated Vietnamese-American homeownership rate in 2006 was slightly higher than that for the U.S. population as a whole.

Mark E. Pfeifer, PhD is an academic librarian at Texas A and M University in Corpus Christi. He is the author of Hmong-Related Works: 1996-2006, an Annotated Bibliography (2007, Scarecrow Press). He is also editor of the Hmong Studies Journal (www.hmongstudies.org) E-mail editor@hmongstudies.org ■

Vietnamese Population Estimates - 2006 American Community Survey

California: 533,893
Texas: 184,096
Washington - 68,308
Florida: 54,204
Virginia: 48,729
Massachusetts: 47,121
Georgia: 44,830
New York: 40,523
Pennsylvania: 35,004
Arizona: 26,308
Louisiana: 24,887
Minnesota: 23,563
Maryland: 22,736
Michigan: 21,854
Illinois: 24,365
New Jersey: 24,251
Oregon: 23,875
North Carolina: 22,698
Colorado: 19,646
Ohio: 18,635
Missouri: 16,849
Oklahoma: 16,678
Kansas: 12,525
Hawaii: 9,564
Nevada: 9,238
Nebraska: 9,163
Alabama: 8,761
Connecticut: 8,324
Iowa: 8,274
Tennessee: 7,854
Indiana: 7,210
Utah: 6,944
South Carolina: 6,493
Wisconsin: 4,953
New Hampshire: 2,720
Arkansas: 2,488
District of Columbia: 2,083
Alaska: 1,537
Rhode Island - 1,017
Wyoming: N.A.
Puerto Rico: N.A.

Vietnamese Profile: 2006 American Community Survey (Total U.S. Population Figures in Parentheses)

U.S. Population: Total Population: 209,866
Total U.S. Population: 1,599,394
Median Age: 34.1 (36.4)
Average Household Size: 3.40 Persons (2.61)
Divorce Rate (Persons 15 Years and Over): 5.5% (10.5%)
Educational Attainment (Persons 25 Years and Over)
Bachelor's Degree: 18.8% (17.1%)
Graduate or Professional Degree: 7.4% (9.9%)
Period of Arrival in U.S.
Entered 2000 or later: 14.6%
Entered 1990 to 1999: 38.8%
Entered before 1990: 46.5%
Language Spoken at Home (Persons 5 Years and Over)
English Only: 16.2%
Language Other than English: 83.8%
Speak English - Less than Very Well: 50.9%
Occupation (Civilian employed population 16 Years and Over)
Management, Professional and Related Occupations: 30.3% (34.0%)
Service Occupations: 24.1% (16.5%)
Sales and Office Occupations: 19.2% (25.9%)
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations: 0.5% (0.7%)
Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, and Repair: 5.8% (10.0%)
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving: 20.1% (13.0%)
Income
Median Family Income: \$56,186 (\$58,526)
Poverty Rate (All Families): 11.3% (9.8%)
Housing Tenure
Owner Occupied Housing Units: 67.8% (67.3%)
Renter Occupied Housing Units: 32.2% (32.7%)

Source Data Set: 2006 American Community Survey: 2006 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.