



January 25, 2018

Office of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs

The Commission on Asian & Pacific
Islander (CAPI) Affairs

Featured API Community Leader Vinh Nguyen

Educator, Mentor and Advocate for New Iowans

From his office at the [Center for New Americans](#) located in downtown Des Moines, Vinh Nguyen guardedly shares details of the circuitous voyage that led him and countless other Vietnamese asylum-seekers to Iowa during the mid-1970's to mid-1980's. To many in the refugee advocacy community, Vinh is a champion for all refugees, immigrants and a tireless force lifting people out of circumstances beyond their control – guiding them to educational attainment and self-sufficiency. For over three decades, Vinh has quietly advanced the causes of these “under dogs,” with no fanfare. He is most satisfied when he sees a student or a family he has helped and mentored find footing in their lives.

Vinh is a 30-year plus employee of Des Moines Public Schools, in which the Center for New Americans is housed. A labor of love, the Center's mission is “to serve and help acclimate newly arrived language minority families into a new environment and school setting.” For Vinh, there is no separation from what he does at his “day job” and the advocacy work he does on behalf of immigrants, refugees and all minorities struggling to learn English. He understands all too clearly how new-comers to the US experience desperation and confusion in learning to function in and navigate a Western society and system.

Among the programs offered at the Center, Vinh is spear-heading a new class formatted to assist eligible refugees and immigrants in understanding the naturalization process. He

designed and developed a tailored curriculum for English Language Learners seeking citizenship, inclusive of the duties, rights and responsibilities that come with US citizenship.

Vinh was one among the over one-million [Vietnamese](#) Boat People who fled persecution by the oppressive communist regime that overtook Vietnam. The odds were slim that Vinh would survive the journey to America. Raised in Vietnam during the 1960's, Vinh lived during a tumultuous time of Vietnamese-American relations. After communist North Vietnam seized power, then-teenage Vinh was indoctrinated in communist philosophies rooted in Marxist and Lenin ideals. Vinh draws a parallel between Vietnam and the current state of communist North Korea, where there is a scarcity of food, political oppression of its people, and no freedom of speech or thought.

Fearing their son would grow up “brainwashed,” Vinh’s parents made the difficult decision to arrange for a smuggler to get him and his siblings out of the country. Anticipating the worst, the family had squirreled away gold and money to pay steep fees demanded by unreliable smugglers. The plan was to get as many family members as possible, one at a time, safely outside Vietnam’s borders. Four members succeeded in reaching freedom.

At 20 years of age, it was Vinh’s turn to flee his hometown of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). He was reluctant to leave his family behind – his entire world as he knew it. The hired smuggler came for him at 5:00 AM in the morning, and from that point on, Vinh was at the mercy of his guide – no questions asked. Buses and taxis took them to the southern port city of Rach Gia – the launching point to enter the Gulf of Thailand. Vinh did not know what to expect; he guessed a ferry or a tanker awaited him. Reality sunk in as he was led onboard an open fishing boat – a vessel measuring only 30 feet long, 10 feet wide. Layers of people crowded in below and above deck. He and 134 other passengers spent a tormenting week out at sea: 133 survived, 2 succumbed.

Shortly after the initial launch, they were chased by coastal military forces, but averted them. What awaited them in the Gulf of Thailand was far more dangerous. Predators in the form of Thai fishermen and other pirates preyed upon the vulnerable boat people. Vinh’s boat was stopped repeatedly by marauders in the gulf, where their vessel was rammed, attacked. Men were tortured. Women were captured, violated and returned each of the four times. Vinh remembers the screams and raw fear to this day. They had nothing to defend themselves with, and provisions were running out.

With hopelessness setting in, an oil rig appeared in the horizon one morning. The boat’s captain knew of no alternative other than ramming the rig with the boat, risking the lives on board, to force the Americans operating it to help them. They had come too far to be forced to leave; they maintained their position and began negotiating with them - in no common language. Fate finally dealt Vinh a good hand. He and the others boarded a massive oil tanker that took them to [Songkhla Refugee Camp](#) in Thailand supported by the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#). The camp designed for 2,000 was over capacity with over 10,000 living inside the fenced location in whatever space was available. He did not stay here long as it was in the process of being closed, and all residents were relocated to another camp near Bangkok. Over the next few months, two more relocations followed: Singapore and [Galang Refugee Camp](#) in Indonesia. Vinh finally arrived in Des Moines in 1982, with more challenges to overcome.

Today, Vinh is an Iowan-American success story - an example of one immigrant who never stopped overcoming the obstacles and never ceased contributing his talents, skills and energies to make his new home a better one in which to live and thrive for others who follow. Among his accomplishments, Vinh established the [Vietnamese American](#)

[Community in Iowa](#) nonprofit and works closely with Vietnam veterans in Iowa in appreciation of their sacrifices.

But those who know him best can tell you about Vinh...

Helene Grossman Fein, PhD, [United Way of Central Iowa Director of Community Impact Services](#)

"I have known Vinh for over 30 years. When he was a Bilingual Tutor for Des Moines Public Schools, I was his manager. He even tutored my daughter in algebra, and now she has been a DMPS teacher for over 15 years.

Vinh's personal story has shaped his outlook and passion for helping others. He is willing to try new ideas to make the lives of the refugee students and their families better. Vinh calls me his American mother, and even though he never sends me a Mother's Day card, I am very proud of him, as proud as I am of my own son."

Nu Huynh, [Iowa Asian Alliance](#) Executive Director

"Vinh is one of the most humble and hardest working individuals you will ever meet. He hasn't stopped working since that very first day when he arrived in the US to obtain a better life for himself. Today, he continues to work tirelessly to help represent and better the Vietnamese community. He has helped pave the way for so many refugees and immigrants."

Kim Poam Logan, API leader and a founding force for the [Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs](#)

"For as long as I've known him, Vinh Nguyen has always been deeply-rooted in our collaborative Asian-American community. He's made many lasting contributions through his involvement and leadership in nearly every meaningful organization and event that unites our community--such as the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the SE Asian Resettlement, the founding of the Iowa Asian Alliance and the Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs--just to name a few."



VOTER ID – Educational Toolkit from Sec. of State

The Iowa Secretary of State's Office has developed a free educational toolkit for groups and organizations to inform voters about recent changes to Iowa election laws.

The toolkit is now available at this link <http://www.voterreadytoolkit.com/>. To sign in, simply click "New User" and sign in using your email address as your username. You will receive an email asking you to reset your password.

All of the materials contained in the electronic toolkit are downloadable.

Tools include:

Voter Integrity rack card

Email templates

News release templates

Power point templates

Sample social media messages

FAQ sheets

Infographics

Samples of the Voter ID card and envelope

VOTER ID -

ID Action will be providing training and educational materials to assist voters. Iowans with Disabilities in Action (ID Action) is a nonpartisan, statewide initiative dedicated to generating greater civic and political participation among people with disabilities.

Visit [ID Action](#) to learn more about this organization.

The infographic is titled "What Iowa's Election Integrity Law Means for Voters" and features the ID Action logo in the top right corner with the tagline "We're courting on you". The content is organized into several sections with blue headers:

- When do voters have to start showing ID at the polls?**

During calendar year 2018, voters will be asked to show their ID before voting at the polls. Anyone who does not have the necessary ID will be asked to sign an oath verifying their identity and will be allowed to cast a regular ballot.

Beginning January 1, 2019, Iowa voters will be required to show a driver's license, non-driver's ID, passport, military ID, veterans ID, or voter ID card at the polls before they vote.
- What about voters who don't have an ID?**

Any registered voter who does not have an ID issued by the Iowa Department of Transportation will be issued a voter ID card for free, automatically. Voter ID cards will need to be signed before going to the polls.
- Is ID required for absentee ballots?**

YES. Beginning January 1, 2018, voters requesting absentee ballots will be required to include their driver's license/non-driver's ID numbers on their request form. Voters receiving the voter ID card will be required to include their card's PIN number on the absentee ballot request form.
- How will signature verification work?**

This new law enables precinct election officials to challenge a voter if they believe the voter is not the person on the identification card; a signature that does not match the signature on the ID is one component of that review. Poll workers will be instructed to NOT reject a ballot based solely on signatures not matching and to take into account all of the information presented to them.

Iowans with Disabilities in Action (ID Action) is a nonpartisan, statewide initiative dedicated to generating greater civic and political participation among people with disabilities.

API Newsmakers

Manisha Paudel faces 'big task' as Des Moines' first equity coordinator

Source: Des Moines Register <http://dmreg.co/2F3uaMr>

Refugee driven to take care of his people

Source: Ottumwa Courier, <http://bit.ly/2FbyxV3>

Iowan: **Maung Hlaing**

Other API Press Clips

Mental Health -

Spring Health's technology looks at the answers of a client assessment and recommends a treatment using a machine-learning algorithm.

How three first-generation immigrants are using machine learning to improve mental health care

Excerpt:

“Patients have really strong preferences around the race, gender, specialty and even geographical location of their provider,” Koh said. “And so for us, as we’re building our networks, one thing that’s incredibly important is diversity. We make sure we have a diversity of races and specialties.”

Source: NBC News, <http://nbcnews.to/2F9tMeO>

New Survey -

Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of Asian Americans

Survey conducted by National Public Radio, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Excerpt:

“...at least one in four Asian Americans said they had been discriminated against when applying for a job (27 percent), being paid equally or considered for a promotion (25 percent), and when trying to rent or buy a home (25 percent).”

Source: [Philanthropy News Digest](#)

Federal Compact of Free Association (COFA) legislation impacting Micronesians -

Bordallo reintroduces Compact Impact Bill

Source: Pacific Daily News, <http://bit.ly/2Dweb8K>

Excerpt:

“Federal treaties called compacts of free association allow citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands to live and work in the United States.”

US House panel approves Bordallo’s Compact Impact amendments

Source: The Marianas Variety, <http://bit.ly/2DD5NZa>

Save the Date: DHR Legislative Day - March 7



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS (DHR) LEGISLATIVE DAY

SAVE THE DATE

MARCH 7, 2018

2:30-4:00 p.m.

State Capitol Rotunda

Commissions

- [Commission of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs](#)
- [Commission of Deaf Services](#)
- [Commission of Latino Affairs](#)
- [Commission of Person with Disabilities](#)
- [Commission of Native American Affairs](#)
- [Commission on the Status of African Americans](#)
- [Commission on the Status of Women](#)
- [Commission on Community Action Agencies](#)

Boards/Councils

- [Department of Human Rights Board](#)
- [Criminal and Juvenile Justice Advisory Council](#)
- [Juvenile Justice Planning Advisory Council](#)
- [Sex Offender Research Council](#)
- [Public Safety Advisory Board](#)
- [Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development/State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council](#)
- [Criminal & Juvenile Justice Integration Systems Advisory Council](#)

**Advocates for
underserved Iowans**

**Connects Iowans to
their communities**

**Empowers Iowans to
become self-
sufficient**

**Improves the
criminal and juvenile
justice system and
public safety**

**Increases positive
youth outcomes**

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

321 E. 12th St
Des Moines, IA 50319
<https://humanrights.iowa.gov>

Contact:
Sonya Streit
Legislative Liaison
(515) 242-5640
sonya.streit@iowa.gov

Lunar New Year Events in Iowa - Year of the Dog



Chinese Association of Iowa
3816 Ingersoll Ave. Des Moines, Iowa 50312
Phone: 515-988-0901 | Email: IowaChinese@yahoo.com | Web: www.iowachinese.us

Chinese Association of Iowa and Grand View University
Co-Host

The 15th Annual Iowa Chinese New Year Celebrations

**Grand View University Student Center, 2811 E 14th St., Des Moines, Iowa
11:00am-9:00pm Saturday Feb. 17, 2018**

11:00am-3:00pm

The 15th Annual Iowa Chinese New Year Celebrations, co-hosted by Chinese Association of Iowa and Grand View University

Chinese Visa Service, sponsored by Chinese Association of Iowa

3:00-5:00pm

Iowa-China Business Forum, co-presented by Chinese Association of Iowa, Iowa-China Business Council, and Immigrant Entrepreneur Summit

\$100 - adult, \$10 - students (reception and dinner included)

5:00-6:30pm

Reception and Dinner, sponsored by Chinese Association of Iowa

\$25 - adult, \$10 - students/children

6:30-9:00pm

The 15th Annual Iowa Chinese Achievement Award Ceremony, presented by Chinese Association of Iowa

Contact:

*Swallow X. Yan, Executive Director,
Chinese Association of Iowa,
515-988-0901, swallowxyan@yahoo.com*

More Celebrations:

Wed. Feb 21 7:00pm

Central Middle School Auditorium, 901 Cedar Street, Muscatine, Iowa

Happy Chinese New Year Concert by Zhejiang Symphony Orchestra, co-presented by Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago, China Arts and Entertainment Group, Muscatine China Initiatives Committee, China Window, and Bank of China

Fri. Feb 23 7:00pm

Ames City Hall, 515 Clark, Ames, Iowa

Chinese New Year Gala by Jiangxi Province Arts Group, co-presented by Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago, Chinese Association of Iowa, and Iowa State University Chinese Students and Scholars Association.


欢乐春节
祖国陪你过年
春节联欢晚会
2018 Chinese New Year

演出团体 Performer:
 江西省艺术团
 Jiangxi Province Art and Performance Group

免费入场 Free Ticket

时间 Time:
 February 23rd, 2018 at 7:00 PM
 (Start Checking at 6:30 PM)

地点 Location:
 Ames City Auditorium, 515 Clark Ave, Ames

联系方式 Contact:
 2018iowaeny@gmail.com
 Bin Huang (515) 710-9385 Yuqian Ren (515) 735-6742

主办：中华人民共和国驻芝加哥总领事馆
 Organizer: Consulate-General of People's Republic of China in Chicago
 江西省文化厅
 Department of Culture of Jiangxi Province
 江西省外事侨务办公室
 Jiangxi Provincial Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office
 协办：爱荷华州华人协会、爱荷华州立大学中国留学生学者联谊会
 Co-Organizer: Chinese Association of Iowa,
 Chinese Students and Scholars Association of Iowa State University

Scan to get
 better seats






KOREAN CULTURAL CONNECTION (KCC) CELEBRATION

What: 2018 Lunar New Year Celebration (cultural lessons, games, food, gift shop)

When: Saturday, February 17, 2018

Time: 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM

Where: Noah's Event Venue, 805 90th St, West Des Moines, IA 50266

Free, open to public. Food/drinks provided; free-will donations accepted.

Visit KCC's Facebook page (<http://bit.ly/2EaNmI0>) or follow them on Twitter @KCCiowa for more details.

TAI DAM COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

What: 2018 Tai Dam New Year Celebration (music, dancing, food)

When: February 24, 2018

Time: 5:00 PM -11:00 PM; dinner 6:00-8:00 PM

Where: U.A.W. Local 450 Hall, 4589 NW 6th Dr., Des Moines, IA 50313

Free, open to public. Food/drinks provided, people are encourage to bring a dish to share.

SIOUX CITY LUNAR NEW YEAR EVENTS

The Vietnamese Catholic community that worships at the Diocese of Sioux City is hosting a small potluck after its service on Sunday, February 18.

The Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Siouxland will worship and celebrate at Pho Mon Buddhist Temple located at 723 Myrtle Street, Sioux City, IA 51103 from 11:30 PM on Thursday, February 15th until midnight, with a dragon dance to immediately follow to ring in the new year. The following Sunday, February 18th from 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM, the Association will host a celebration of food, music, contests and other activities. This event is open to the public and free-will donations will be accepted.

* If your community's event was not listed above, please contact Tina Shaw (tina.shaw@iowa.gov) with details of your upcoming event so that it may be posted to the DHR-API website.



[Tina Shaw](#) | Executive Officer

Office of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs | Iowa Department of Human Rights

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Website: <https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas/capi>