

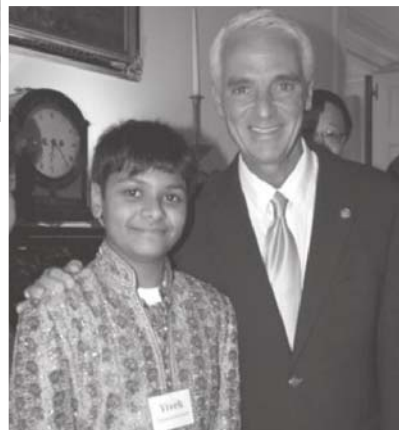
2010 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Celebrations Asian Coalition of Tallahassee ■ By *Thayumanasamy Somasundaram*



◀ Cylde Diao speaking at Governor's Reception

law 101-283 and President George H.W. Bush on May 14, 1991 signed it into law thus extending the week-long celebration to a month. Pursuant to this law President Barrack Obama has issued proclamation designating May as the **Asian Pacific American Heritage Month**. Cities, counties, and states across the US have since recognized this occasion in variety of ways.

Asian Coalition of Tallahassee (ACT | www.asiantlh.org) is a Florida non-profit umbrella organization with over dozen member associations and



Vivek Somasundaram with Governor Charlie Crist

One of the advantages of living in Tallahassee is the diversity of people and cultures you come across when you walk around the town. This is not a coincidence since Tallahassee is relatively a small city but attracts people from all over the state due the presence of government, academic, and business centers. You witness this vibrant diversity in the government offices, college campuses, restaurants and businesses, and at cultural and ethnic festivals and celebrations. Asians and Asian Pacific Americans represent one segment of this diversity. Even though they represent about 2.5% (Census 2000 data) of the total population of Tallahassee they are the fastest growing and influential ethnic group. Celebrating the diversity and recognizing the contributions of this group is gaining importance not only in Tallahassee but throughout the state of Florida. One such recognition is the celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

In 1977 NY Representative Frank Horton and CA Representative Norman Mineta introduced a US House resolution that called upon the President of United States of America to declare the first ten days in May as the Asian Pacific American Heritage Week. Soon Hawaii Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga introduced a companion resolution in the US Senate. Both the resolutions passed and on October 5, 1978 President James Earl Carter signed the joint resolution. With the President's signature the Asian Pacific Heritage Week Celebration officially began. Then the 101st Congress of United States passed the public

individuals representing several Asian and Asian-Pacific countries. It was established in 2004 by the current Chairman Dr. Clyde Diao to allow people to get together, showcase the talents of its members, and share their rich culture and heritage with others

by organizing festivals and celebrations. In keeping with this tradition, ACT planned 2010 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month celebration with several events spread throughout the month of May:

- Monday, May 3, 2010: Proclamation by Governor Charlie Crist of Florida
- Friday, May 7-28, 2010: Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Art Exhibition
- Saturday, May 15, 2010: Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Celebration
- Sunday, May 16, 2010: Indian Classical Dance Recital – Tallahassee Nriteya Mela
- Wednesday, May 19, 2010: Taiwanese/Chinese Cooking Demonstration
- Monday, May 24, 2010: Reception at Governor Charlie Crist's Mansion

Art Exhibition

Talented artists originally from India (Roopali Kambo), Pakistan (Anosh Gill), and Japan (Atsunori Imai and Mikiko Tanaka) exhibited their artworks at the Reflections Art Gallery at the FSU Center for Global Engagement (CGE). The exhibi-

tion formally opened on Friday, May 7, 2010 and will remain open through the month of May. This Art Exhibition is one of the stops in Tallahassee's First Friday Gallery tour. First Friday Gallery Tour is organized by Tallahassee's Council on Cultural and Arts (COCA) to encourage people to visit art galleries thorough out the city on the first Friday of every month. With this Art Exhibition, ACT hopes to showcase the talents of Asian visual artists.

Celebration at CGE

On Saturday, May 15, 2010 fifteen different groups and associations representing various Asian and Asian-Pacific countries gathered at the Center for Global Engagement for a daylong celebration of music, dance, visual and martial art displays. Dancers from World Ballet, Troupe Arabesque, Tallahassee Japanese Community, TCC Dance Company, and Indian Gujarati Samaj performed several pieces representing their cultures and heritages dressed in beautiful ethnic attire. Members from the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Filipino communities played musical instruments, and sang vocal numbers. Okinawan martial arts and Arni de Mano groups demonstrated self-defense skills. Tallahassee mayor John Marks III welcomed the diversity and applauded the skills of the performers. Members of FSU's Center for Global Engagement were most passionate supporters of the gathering. This is obvious since large fraction of international students attending the colleges in Tallahassee come from Asian countries.

Classical Dance Recital

The following day two Indian classical dancer/choreographers Srividya Angara and Megaah Ashhok took to the stage at FSU's Moore auditorium and enthralled the crowd with several classical dance numbers. The dances they performed belonged to the Kuchipudi style of the South Indian classical dance genre. Since they were not only dancers but choreographers themselves, they performed fusion numbers that combined the classical Indian dance set to Western Classical music. Young children from Tallahassee who were learning the classical dance form themselves performed a piece.

Cooking Demonstration

On Tuesday, May 18 at FSU's CGE and again on Wednesday, May 19 at AZU restaurant, Taiwanese chefs Angela Cheng and When-Tsung Chen cooked delicious Chinese and Taiwanese dishes. They came to the United States to do the cook-



Filipino dancers ready for performance

ing demonstration on the invitation of Lucy Ho a famous restaurateur and a Chinese cook herself to be part of the Asian Pacific American Heritage month. The chefs showed how to make Xing Bao mushroom and fried chicken salad to the delight of the audience. Then everyone enjoyed the freshly cooked dishes.

Governor's Reception at the Mansion

The final event that capped the month long celebration came on Monday, May 24, 2010 at the Governor's Mansion in Tallahassee, Florida. On that evening between 6:00 and 7:30 PM Florida's Governor Charlie Crist held a reception for over 350 Asian Pacific Americans and their families at the Governor's Mansion. Asians from South, Central, Northwest, Southeast and North Florida were invited to the reception to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage month. The event was organized by Dr Clyde Diao, Chairman, Asian Coalition of Tallahassee and Dr. Joy Bruce, President, Asian American Federation of Florida (AAFF). During the event, Mr Bob Sparks, Executive Deputy Chief of Staff for the Governor, Dr. Joy Bruce, President, AAFF, Dr. Thayumanasamy Somasundaram, President, India Association of Tallahassee, Dr. Clyde Diao, Chairman, Asian Coalition of Tallahassee, and finally Honorable Charlie Crist, Governor of Florida spoke. Dr. Bruce praised the Governor for recognizing Florida Asian American communities' aspirations and Dr. Somasundaram mentioned that the Governor's willingness to engage with diverse group of people will make him a great role model for young people who are the future of Florida. During his speech, Dr. Diao mentioned that Governor Crist was the first Florida Governor to make a proclamation recognizing the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and praised his leadership for continuing the tradition. Governor Crist mentioned that he is happy to part of Florida that is attracting people from diverse cultures and heritages, and recalled that he himself is a grandson of immigrant from Cyprus. He concluded that Florida benefits from diversity of people irrespective of whether they are Asian Americans, Hispanic American, or African Americans.

The events organized by Asian Coalition of Tallahassee highlighted not only the diversity of people it also demonstrated that several Asian and Asian Pacific American Associations can come together for a common good.



Coquetry by Roopali Kambo



Gujarati samaj dancers



Young Indian dancers from Tallahassee



Dancers from Japanese Community of Tallahassee



Indian Classical dancers



Talented young musicians playing violin



Thayumanasamy Somasundaram, is the Chairman-Elect of Asian Coalition of Tallahassee and the President of India Association of Tallahassee.