

Asian Coalition of Tallahassee's 2010 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Celebrations



Tallahassee and Leon County

Tallahassee (meaning 'Old Fields' in Native American language) is the capital of the State of Florida and the seat of the Leon County. One advantage of living in Tallahassee, where you are surrounded by oak trees draped in Spanish moss, 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 to 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) 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 of such recognition is the celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.



Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM) History



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 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 recognized this occasion and have worked with local and state organizations in celebrating the month by making proclamations and actively participating in it.

Asian Coalition of Tallahassee (ACT)



Asian Coalition of Tallahassee (ACT | www.asiantlh.org) is a Florida non-profit umbrella organization with over dozen member associations and 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, 2010 Asian Pacific American

Heritage Month celebration was planned with several events spread throughout the month.

- 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 work at the Reflections Art Gallery at the [FSU Center for Global Engagement](#) (CGE). The exhibition was part of the Asian Pacific American Heritage month 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](#). Tallahassee’s First Friday Gallery Tour is organized by Tallahassee’s [Council on Cultural and Arts](#) (COCA).



Painting by Anosh Gill

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 in which children and adults dressed in beautiful ethnic attire participated. 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 supports of the gathering.



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. They performed *Kuchipudi* style of the South Indian classical dance genre. Since one of them was not only a dancer but a choreographer herself, she performed a fusion number that combined the classical Indian dance set to Western Classical music. Young children from [India Association of Tallahassee](#) who are 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 US to do the cooking demonstration on the invitation of Lucy Ho a famous restaurateur and great Chinese cook herself to be part of the Asian Pacific American Heritage month. They showed how to make Xing Bao mushroom and fried chicken salad to the delight of the audience. Then everyone enjoyed the freshly cooked dishes.

Reception at the Governor's 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, Florida's Governor Charlie Crist invited over 350 Asian Pacific Americans and their families to the

People's House for a reception held between 6:00 and 7:30 PM. 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 like his son. 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 increasingly attracting people from diverse cultures and heritages, and recalled that he himself is a grandson of immigrant from Cyprus. He concluded by saying that Florida benefits from diversity of people irrespective of whether they are Asian Americans, Hispanic American, or African Americans.



The celebrations organized by Asian Coalition of Tallahassee highlighted the success and influence of Asian Americans and showcased the cooperation among them.



About the author: *Thayumanasamy Somasundaram is the Chairman-Elect of Asian Coalition of Tallahassee and the President of India Association of Tallahassee. He likes to write about Asian and Indian community affairs. May 2010.*