

Unity of Voices honors newly- elected and appointed AAPI and Black officials



Unity of Voices participants honored newly elected and appointed Asian and Black officials from 2021.

By Kai Curry
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

“Okage sama de (I am who I am because of you).”
It is a Japanese phrase that Toshiko Grace Hasegawa

wears as a tattooed reminder, and the theme of the Unity of Voices virtual celebration on Jan. 13, organized by Black and Asian American and Pacific

see UNITY on 16

Little Saigon clean-up hints at community resolve



Volunteers on their way to Operation Clean Street in Little Saigon on Jan. 15.

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

A student wearing a black rain slicker reached down

with a long trash picker, clamped down on a needle, and deposited it in a biohazard receptacle held by another

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SITAL KALANTRY

Steeped in two worlds, law professor crusades for women's rights

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Sital Kalantry was a young girl when her parents sent her back to India to stay with her grandmother. During that summer, her grandmother told her that she was going to “marry her off to a rich man” so she’d never have to worry about anything except her household.

Kalantry cried the whole way back on the plane to New York, frightened by a glimpse into an alternate universe that might have been her life if her parents had not immigrated to the United States.

“My fate was altered by moving to another country,” she said.

As she grew up and later attended law school, she eventually found her calling by dedicating her life to making sure women and others disadvantaged by their societies had similar ways to escape their fate.

She has worked as a corporate lawyer (for 7 years), taught at Cornell Law School (for 15 years), and now teaches at Seattle University (S.U.) Law School, and her work has encompassed such harrowing topics as survivors of acid attacks in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and women in prison in Argentina, in an interview in which she is almost breezy and cheerfully optimistic.

She uses her grounding in both Asian and American cultures to fight for justice in both places and encourage others to do the same.

“I feel like as somebody who is bicultural, I think I bring an approach to my academic work that is unique and that allows me to do comparative law work through a different lens, and to also bring those insights into public advocacy work in the United States,” she said.

see KALANTRY on 12

CID shooting

Seattle police responded to a shooting at 8th Avenue South and South King Street on Jan. 17 at around 2:40 p.m.

When officers arrived, they found a 53-year-old man with a graze wound. The victim was transported to Harborview Medical

Center in stable condition.

The victim told police that he and the suspect had a dispute prior to the shooting, which occurred in a tent at an encampment.

Officers collected ballistic evidence and are continuing to investigate. ■

EDITORIAL

Out with the old...

Sleeves rolled up, all hands on deck.

Nearly 150 volunteers, or “Change Agents,” as organizer Linh Thai called them, turned up for Operation Clean Street in Little Saigon on Jan. 15. It was a combined effort of The Mission Continues, Friends of Little Saigon, and the City of Seattle.

Donned in KN95 masks, safety gloves, trash pickers, and trash bags, the Change Agents split up into smaller groups to clean their assigned grid.

Thai told volunteers, “We are here because we are making a commitment to tackle these challenges together in the spirit and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. today and every day in 2022. If you and I

are committed to that, the collective impact will be felt, and we are the catalysts for positive change in our community. Your presence and leadership confirm this belief.”

It’s a good start for 2022 and the new Bruce Harrell administration.

The new mayor had emphasized public safety in his inauguration speech, noting that he wants to create a “one Seattle” where “we all feel safe and supported.”

Right now, Little Saigon feels supported. Now, it is seen and heard, after years of what has felt like neglect, despite several pleas to rid the streets of trash and bad actors, someone has decided to step up and take action.

“Let’s be realistic about our impact on one day of work,” Thai said. “It won’t solve long and enduring issues and challenges confronting this neighborhood and other neighborhoods around this city.”

We agree. Operation Clean Street was a great first step. And we hope to see more—that this isn’t just a one-off.

We were happy to witness elected officials, such as King County Councilmembers Joe McDermott and Girmay Zahilay, Seattle City Councilmember Tammy Morales, state Sen. Joe Nguyen, and Congressman Adam Smith, get dirty. This is the only kind of dirt we want to see our politicians involved in! And we want to see more involvement from other officials and

community leaders—perhaps with their family members and children, as a show of confidence to the general public that it is safe to come here.

We’re tired of the old news of robberies, thefts, assaults, shootings, and drug-dealing in the open.

We want fresh news of businesses thriving and booming because visitors are no longer afraid and are flocking in record numbers to experience all that Little Saigon and Chinatown have to offer.

Yes, please! Let 2022, the Year of the Tiger, be the year that the entire city will hear the roar of our community—and it will not be a cry for help, but rather a thunderous roar of our strength and prosperity. ■

LITTLE SAIGON from 1

student. The act was small, but it indicated the resolve of almost 150 people who showed up on Jan. 15 to clean Little Saigon of refuse lining its streets, sidewalks, and parking lots.

The event, organized by a national nonprofit that links veterans with community service programs, The Mission Continues, in partnership with Friends of Little Saigon, was in response to a widespread sense among community members and advocates that they had been neglected by the government.

“The entire community has been traumatized, felt abandoned by elected leaders (at city and county levels), and frustrated by the pandemic and crimes. People hungered for the right message, the right team, with the right call to action to come and act,” said Lin Thai, regional operations manager.

A number of officials showed up for the event, called “Operation Clean Street,” and took part in picking up litter and needles, using gear provided by Seattle Public Utilities, such as safety vests and trash pickers with pincers at the end.

From the side of the road, the long train of brightly festooned volunteers appeared indistinguishable from a road gang of convicts released to clean up a city block as part of their parole.

But from closer up, as a video taken by a Seattle University student club revealed, many of the participants were in their teens and 20s, savoring coffee and making a V with their fingers for the camera. Students from Garfield High School, as well as almost a dozen veterans, also showed up.

The majority appeared to be Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI).

For some, including officials, the event was nostalgic, trying to save a blighted community that had once been a source of hope and joy.

“Little Saigon is a special community where just about



Volunteers pick up trash off the streets of Little Saigon

every Vietnamese family who came to Washington in the 1980s and 1990s would gather on weekends to enjoy the food and shop for groceries,” said state Sen. Joe Nguyen. “Bringing together local leaders and community members is how we’ll be able to overcome the tough issues facing Little Saigon. We were able to make a small dent to build a brighter future and I believe this will serve as the catalyst for change.”

Congressman Adam Smith said the event honored the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., which he described as, “justice and equal rights, and the constant effort to improve that to achieve greater equality in America, to combat racism and bigotry and truly create equality in this country.”

Smith also praised the diversity of the participants. “There are a lot of people here making a difference in the community and it’s bringing people together.”

The population of Vietnamese refugees grew after the Vietnam War in the late 1970s, but the neighborhood did not earn its nickname until 1984 after Southeast Asian merchants

established a presence there. But since then, like Chinatown a few blocks away, it has faced crisis after crisis as city and regional officials have funneled much of the city’s problems into its confines, even while neglecting its safety and upkeep.

Still, organizers of the event said many in the city have come to the realization that it must be saved.

“A couple of days prior to the event, I had to close down event registration, replying to text messages and emails turning down requests to participate from dozens of folks in the city, some coming as far as Shoreline to the North and Burien to the South,” said Thai, who was formerly a company commander in the U.S. Army. “Throughout the event, folks were asking, ‘Are you organizing more events like this soon?’”

Girmay Zahilay, a King County councilmember who turned out for the event, marveled at the number of volunteers.

“I am inspired by the number of volunteers who showed up for the Little Saigon Community Cleanup today! Great to see some love and attention for the

neighborhood. Thank you, The Mission Continues, Friends of Little Saigon, and Seattle Public Utilities for organizing. And of course, big shout out to Linh Thai!” he said.

Earlier this month, the Seattle Times published an editorial calling on local officials to protect Little Saigon. This newspaper followed with its own editorial, commending the Times for taking notice of the community’s problems, but pointed out these have been endemic for years, including rampant theft and burglary, drug problems, violence, homeless encampments, and a seemingly indifferent response by law enforcement.

During the clean-up, Seattle Police Captain Steve Strand, the West Precinct Commander, said the police were committed to providing safety.

“I am excited to take part in this day of giving back to honor the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. The Seattle Police are here to serve our community, today and every day. I am deeply committed to making our neighborhoods better for our children, and the future,” he said.

For the most part, Saturday’s event was focused on trash. Volunteers assembled in a parking lot abutting the Mi La Cay restaurant, then disbursed.

According to organizers, they picked up over 2,000 pounds of trash, although exact figures were being calculated by Seattle Public Utilities. That amounts to approximately 304 work hours, said Thai.

The Seattle University video showed volunteers working behind dumpsters, gingerly scooping needles off the ground, and even removing a blue rubber glove from a shrubbery by the road.

Thai said he expected the event would kick off others to follow—perhaps even a recurring monthly clean-up—and was soliciting feedback from participants, businesses, and officials.

Officials who took part shared their exuberance about the project and promised to find more resources for the community in the future.

“The clean-up in Little Saigon was truly a community coming together in a time of need. I was happy to add my labor in the clean-up, but commit to ensuring King County is invested in the long-term work,” said King County Councilmember Joe McDermott.

Seattle City Councilmember Tammy Morales said she was collaborating with Zahilay and McDermott to “find solutions” for the community.

“Little Saigon is one of Seattle’s most important cultural centers, and right now it’s struggling. I am committed to doing everything I can to help—from fighting for the city to providing much-needed resources for Little Saigon to rolling up my sleeves and helping keep our community clean,” she said. ■

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Courtesy of The Mission Continues