



# Stories Within Us

Contributions of Immigrants in  
Santa Clara County



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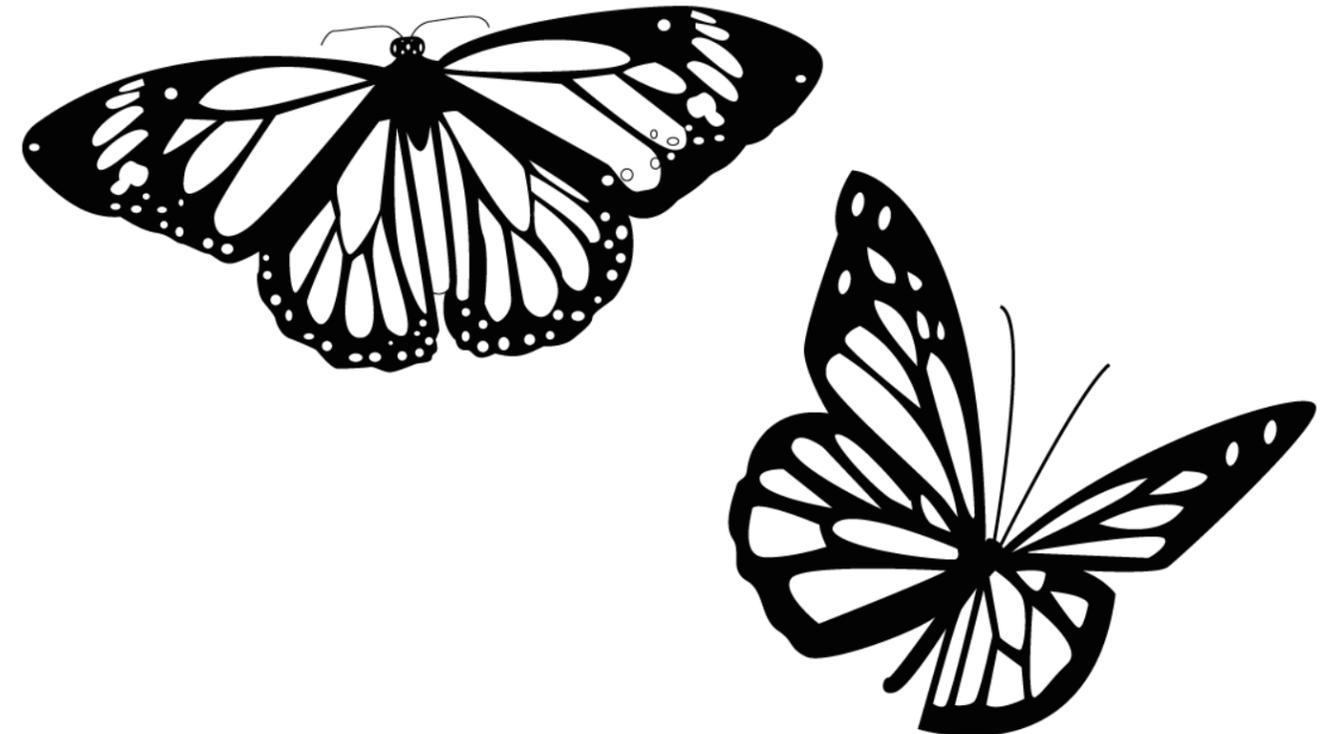
### Cover design

Madeline Qu designed the front and back covers. Learn more about her on page 4.



# New Americans Fellows

The Santa Clara County's Office of Immigrant Relations is pleased to present a selection of immigrant stories collected by the members of the 2022 New American Fellowship (NAF) cohort. This Fellowship provides immigrant students with opportunities to increase their leadership skills, advance their goals in specific fields of study, and to learn about County services and programs. Every year, Fellows also participate in a research project that promotes social justice and equity. This year, the 14 Fellows conducted over 30 oral history interviews with immigrants from Mexico, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), Philippines, Iran, Laos, Guatemala, Korea, Japan, Egypt, Thailand, Indonesia, Peru, Portugal, and Yugoslavia (Bosnia-Herzegovina). The following summary is only a sample of the larger collection of immigrant stories that describe the great work and impact of the local immigrant community. These stories do not only represent examples of the immense contributions of immigrants, but also give the readers an insight into the creativity, dedication, resilience, and ingenuity of our local immigrant families. The story narrators had different immigration pathways, but they share many common values, goals, and dreams. They found solutions for the great challenges experienced when they started their lives in a new country, and continue to address unequal access to information, resources, and decision-making. The sixteen stories selected for this issue of the magazine do not represent the entire collected material, nor the extent of diversity of countries of origin, but they do provide a preview of the extensive material that documents invaluable, essential, and often underpaid work, strength, resilience, forward-thinking, and inventiveness of our local immigrants. All interviews were conducted between July 5 and July 22, 2022.



# 2022 Cohort



## Victor Landaverde

Victor Landaverde is twenty-four-year-old resident of San Jose. He studies Criminal Justice at San Jose State University and pursuing a Master and eventually Ph.D. in Psychology. His advanced communication skills allow him to articulate and express himself to others, to achieve a common goal. With his study in criminal justice and focus on psychology he hopes to reach the least privileged individuals such as black and brown males to inspire them to assert their place in the world and pursue their highest potential.



## Britany Gutierrez

Britany Gutierrez is an immigrant from Michoacan, Mexico who now calls East Side San Jose her second home. She is currently navigating higher education at San Jose State University as a first-generation psychology student pursuing her bachelor's degree. Moving forward, she wants to continue being an advocate for marginalized communities regardless of the environment that she is in.



## Carmen Ochoa

Carmen Ochoa is a Santa Clara resident, DACA recipient, and college student. She is continuing her education in De Anza College to obtain A.A sociology and Majoring in San Jose State in Child and Adolescent Development. Carmen has over 8 years of teaching experience working with children ages 5-10 in several educational systems. She is committed to providing students with necessary tools to archive their academic goals to close the education gap.



## Enrique Rojas Sanchez

Enrique Rojas Sanchez is a 29-year-old resident of San Jose, San Jose State University Business School alumnus, and DACA recipient. His experience and relationships built in the hospitality industry equipped him with knowledge and understanding to serve his community. As a business administration graduate, he plans on working towards a career in IT project management. He is committed to assisting and empowering students, who like him, must study and work to achieve their goals.



## Guadalupe Vazquez

Guadalupe Vazquez is a Mountain View resident, DACA recipient, and a recent graduate from UC Merced with a B.A in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies. She hopes to use her degree, mentorship experience, and passion for social justice to empower, raise awareness, and help demarginalize communities.



## Isaac Zhang

Isaac Zhang was born and raised in China. He is currently a college student majoring in Political Science and wants to attend law school after he graduates. He is interested in volunteering in community activities and local government elections. As an immigrant, he aspires to become an immigration lawyer and is committed to social justice.



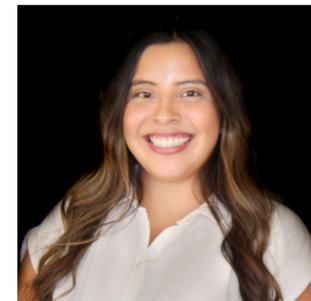
## Juan Beltran

Juan Beltran is a first-generation immigrant from El Salvador. Beltran received a bachelor's degree from San Francisco State University in the Fall of 2021. He is passionate about pursuing higher education, preferably a Ph.D. program at UC Berkeley and dedicated to helping communities who are underrepresented.



## Juan Coronado

Juan Coronado is an immigrant from Jalisco, Mexico and was raised in the Santa Clara-Sunnyvale area for 20 years. He is a first-generation college student attending San Jose State University, where he is pursuing his bachelor's degree in business marketing. He would prefer working in the food/beverage or tech industry. He would love to become a spark of generational wealth accumulation in his family and teach marginalized communities about financial literacy, investing, budget planning, tax-deduction opportunities, etc.



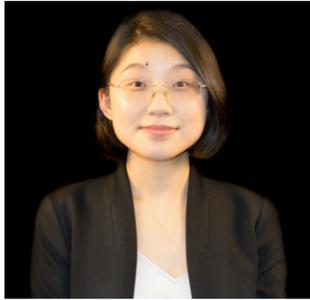
## Karla Venegas Garcia

Karla Venegas Garcia, is a soon to be San Jose State University Undergrad obtaining a bachelor's degree in Sociology with a minor in Human Rights. She has worked as aquatics lead instructor for the last 5 years and is ready to make a new commitment. Currently she has been working with the Office of Immigrant Relations as a fellow and has developed new skills regarding qualitative research. With her experience in leadership development, she hopes to be a new asset in social services. Her aspiration in life is to be successful in many aspects, for her own benefit, to support her family, and to enhance her professional development.



## Andrea Castro

Andrea Castro is a 30-year-old graduate student in the Justice Studies department at San Jose State University. She is a prison educator and youth mentor who is committed to social justice and giving back to her community. Her graduate qualitative research focuses on prisoner reentry, prison rehabilitation, and correctional education. She will be pursuing a doctorate program with a professional law degree after finishing her Master's. Her long-term goal is to teach underrepresented college students and practice public interest law to help formerly incarcerated populations and other marginalized communities.



### **Madeline Qu**

Madeline Qu is a junior Graphic Design student at San Jose State University. She is passionate about improving people's life experiences by participating in community programs and design activities. Madeline is also learning UX/UI because the experience of working as a user research coordinator in a tech company sparked her curiosity about how technologies can accelerate people's productivity.



### **Maria Montoya**

Maria Montoya is a first generation, low-income, undocu-Latina. She is a second-year student majoring in Business Administration at the University of California Berkeley. As a member of marginalized communities, Maria understands the struggles and hardships that come with being underrepresented. It is also why she carries a passion for social advocacy and aspires to give back to underserved communities in her personal life and throughout her career.



### **Natali Zepeda**

Natali Zepeda is a Dean of Students at San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School with over 14 years of experience working in the public education system. Her work consists of helping young adults ages 17 1/2 - 27 graduate from high school. By focusing on supporting high school students become successful, Natali has been able to build partnerships with community organizations all over the Bay Area. Over the years Natali's strengths have generated some recognitions from ESUHSD, Student Link Services as well as the 50th Super Bowl Play Maker Grant. It is the passion for working with youth who have been underserved that makes her get up every morning with great enthusiasm. When Natali is not at work, she is pursuing her college degree at San Jose City College. She loves spending time with her husband, family, and friends.



### **Naz Nawabi**

Naz Nawabi is an Afghan from Concord and the first to go to college in her family. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Public Health with a minor in Psychology. She is not sure what she would like to do in that field yet, and still trying to find out what her passion is. While studying at San Jose State University, she is also working as a part-time hairstylist in Walnut Creek. She has accumulated 6 years of hairstyling experience at this salon.

# NAF 2022





# In Kindness, Gratitude and Power Toward Change

By Andrea Castro

## MYLENE MADRID

**M**ylene Madrid is a first-generation immigrant from the Philippines who arrived in the U.S. when she was nine with her mother and two sisters. Her kindness, compassion, and motivation to make the U.S. a safe and welcoming place for communities that are struggling for a new beginning in this country is both inspiring and relatable.

Mylene's father first arrived in the U.S. to complete his Ph.D. in Oregon. He had worked as a college professor in the Philippines. A year later, the family joined him in the U.S. while he continued to pursue his education. The family left the Philippines to guarantee a better future for their daughters in the U.S.

Upon arrival, the family experienced culture shock, significant language barriers, and lack of health insurance. Throughout her childhood, Mylene also remembers not being able to integrate into American culture quickly, feeling like she would fall behind in school if she did not learn right away. In an effort to support her integration, her parents did not encourage her to continue speaking their native Filipino dialect.

Eventually, the family moved to Vallejo, California where Mylene entered the tenth grade, experiencing yet another culture shock. While Vallejo was very welcoming to both her and other family members, it was an adjustment. Fortunately, Vallejo was academically driven and they did not experience racism like her father had while living in Oregon. Mylene remains grateful for the sacrifices her parents made to ensure her future, and the impact of that gratitude is relatable and powerful.

While navigating the pressures of assimilation, Mylene's appreciation for her family's cultural traditions remains strong and revolves largely around family gatherings and sharing native Filipino food. She emphasizes gratitude and music as important cultural traditions that were brought from the Philippines. She also emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony among the family, along with creating respectful and welcoming spaces for everyone. The cultural dances she learned as a child before migrating to the U.S. are also aspects she holds dear.

Mylene's journey eventually led her to work in the public health sector for several years where she has worked in multiple departments helping the refugee and immigrant communities. While working for Santa Clara County, Mylene has served on different committees where she has focused on cultural competency to improve the quality of life for all immigrants and refugees arriving to the County. The refugee programs that she has advocated to maintain have helped many refugees find resources and other necessities.

Regarding her long-term career, Mylene remains grateful for the women mentors she has had over the years, as they have shared wisdom and provided inspiration for her ongoing work. She is proud to serve as Chair for the local World Refugee Day planning committee and looks forward to continuing her social justice work for years to come. Mylene believes that adequate education and employment opportunities should be provided to the community by highlighting the importance of changing the refugee narrative of misconceptions that is erroneously perpetuated. She continues to advocate for accepting and welcoming refugees into all communities and remains committed to supporting them in their transition from their difficult journey toward arrival in the U.S. Mylene's dedication to the causes she is committed to are commendable, inspiring others to pursue their dreams of helping others make the world a better place.

**“Approach everyone with kindness because you don't know what they're going through”**

# The Power in Community

By Enrique Rojas Sanchez

Carlos Da Silva is a humble man who is proud of the work he and his family have done here in Santa Clara County, including actively supporting and contributing to the Portuguese community. As a nine-year-old child, Carlos came to the U.S. from Portugal with his parents in the 1950s.

In Portugal, Carlos's family owned land, a family home, and a farm. Even so, life was not easy. To add to the struggles, the Capelinhos volcano had recently erupted in his homeland of the Azore islands in Portugal. Shortly after, his family immigrated to the U.S. through a family unification petition under his uncle's sponsorship.

Within the U.S., there were additional difficulties as they initially did not have much. His parents had to rent their living space as they started working in the dairy industry. Fortunately, they were embraced by the local community, and a unified community made their life easier. Carlos also reflected on the strength of unity between the Hispanic and Portuguese immigrants in helping each other succeed. The collective power eased their struggles and Carlos saw tangible improvements in his family over the years, such as succeeding in homeownership.

Language barriers were another challenge for Carlos as there were no bilingual Portuguese/English instructional programs to support him in his studies. Over the years, he improved his English and professional skills through conversation by talking to his friends consistently. Through his own experience, Carlos realized that once you get involved with the community, you learn many skills, inspire others, and find motivation by participating in collective actions. He hopes new immigrants can be involved with the community to help each other in similar ways.

Carlos's experience as a community organizer is empowering. Formerly, he was an employee of

International Paper and Georgia-Pacific from which he retired due to a work-related disability and ongoing back pain. Like his parents, he invested a lot of hard labor over the span of thirty-five years. He held multiple positions, including being a supervisor to other workers and serving as president of labor organizations. Currently, Carlos volunteers at the Portuguese Organization for Social Services and Opportunities (POSSO), based in San Jose. The Portuguese community often comes together to help each other as they celebrate their culture and organize volunteer drives. Carlos has also worked within the community through neighborhood associations, such as the Roosevelt Neighborhood Association helping with redevelopment and cleaning different neighborhoods, and he remains a member of Evergreen Community Action Team. He has developed unique leadership skills, supporting other community members from behind the scenes to become leaders. He plans to continue sharing his rich life experiences and knowledge with his community.

Carlos hopes people know that there have always been challenges when people arrive to the U.S. Many arrive with misinformation about the lifestyle here and are not aware of the immigrant stereotypes, such as that immigrants take jobs from Americans. Immigrants do the work that others do not accept because they must work hard to survive. He emphasized that immigrants and others who are not paid a living wage could not afford to stay in the Bay Area and risk becoming homeless. Some affordable housing projects might improve the situation, but they cannot fundamentally solve the problem, he added. Carlos believes change can occur if politicians and communities start working with each other and calls for a "unification of politicians to work towards the same goals, instead of creating a divide in the nation." His story, raw and authentic, is one of family unity, determination, community care, and the power of volunteerism. It inspires hope.

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unification of politicians to work towards the same goals, instead of creating a divide in the nation.

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# A Chinese Anchor in the Bay Area

By Isaac Zhang

“Just get it done, there are lots of challenges every day. Whatever I need to do, I just get it done.”

## LYNNE KU

**L**ynne Ku is an ambitious, caring, and persevering force. She was born and raised in Taiwan and immigrated to the United States in 2001 to join her husband who had already been living in San Francisco. Her guiding motto is “just get it done” and she tackles whatever the challenges are with a commitment to overcome them for the benefit of her community.

When she was a high school student in Taiwan, Lynne Ku’s dream was to become a journalist. To pursue her dream, she went to college in Taiwan and majored in journalism. After graduating, she worked in the media industry for several TV stations. After she came to the U.S., she landed a part-time job at KTSF News as a news correspondent, the channel that delivers news throughout the Bay Area to its Chinese population. She translated English script into Chinese and practiced her writing and translation skills on the job. Successively, she went to San Francisco City College to take ESL courses in order to improve her English skills. After serving three years in news writing, she got a position as a reporter with KTSF News. Because of her assiduous work, she eventually landed a position as an anchor.

Mrs. Ku has been working for KTSF News for over twenty years. The news stories she produces cover the entire Bay Area, including Santa Clara County. Her job plays a big role in helping her community. Within the Chinese community, there is a significant need for information in their native language. She helps those who have language barriers to get the right information in an accessible way. Her job serves as a bridge to bring the mainstream news to the Chinese community and make people’s lives easier. This media outlet also educates the larger community about the issues and priorities impacting the Chinese community, such as stories about immigration more broadly, along with immigrant and civil rights coverage more specifically. Mrs. Ku’s coverage of these stories is of special importance for the community.

Although Ku has lived in the U.S. for over twenty years, she still maintains some Chinese traditions and customs. She shared, “In Chinese communities, we care about family, we put families first. Also, we celebrate Chinese Festivals, including Chinese Lunar New Year, and mid-autumn festivals.” Most of the time Ms. Ku cooks Chinese food at home, but she also likes to try the many different flavors of American cuisine, including mainstream American, Latin American, Italian, and other types of food. In Taiwan, people work very hard. Here, the hard-working culture still impacts her, and she wants to contribute her very best when doing her job by making the news she writes relevant for people’s lives. One of the benefits of life in the Bay Area that Ms. Ku emphasized was the fact that she started to enjoy the quiet life, instead of the extremely busy pace that she experienced in Taiwan. Since coming to this country, she has also learned that we need to speak up to protect our individual and collective rights.

Not only does she care about her community, but she cares about the refugee and homeless communities. She thinks that resources should be distributed effectively to help refugees and homeless people, referencing housing and education as critically important. Education could help people to learn skills to support themselves, while special programs could help refugees to develop skills to transition.

For immigrants, while it might be difficult to land a job in mainstream media, we still have our advantages when connecting with our communities. Like Mrs. Ku, we could make use of our culture and language advantages to connect with our community, help those in need, and broaden our community’s influence, anchoring our communities in our collective strength.



# Continuing the legacy of service and community involvement

By Karla Venegas Garcia

## DON LONG

**D**on Long came to the United States as a refugee from Vietnam when he was a child. In reflecting on his journey prior to coming to this country, he talks about images from a refugee camp that was very crowded with over 30,000 individuals in a limited space that restricted their freedom. Although he was very young during this period of his life, he recalls the camp being very unhygienic, the food being very unpleasant, and the sound of the rain hitting the camp. His family, like several others, endured this hardship as part of their efforts to flee the war in Vietnam, eventually immigrating to the United States.

Once in the U.S., Long started school here in Santa Clara County. His family faced overcrowded housing at first, but over the years they overcame this situation by saving enough money to purchase their own home. Soon they began to rent out rooms and make the garage into a living space in order to also rent it out. This allowed them to pay off their home and to enhance their financial literacy.

Despite the obstacles he faced with discrimination and adjustment, Long succeeded academically and continued his education in Southern California at the University of California Riverside where he completed his bachelor's degree in Psychology and Ethnic Studies. Long continued his education back in the Bay Area, earning a Master's degree in Business Administration at San Francisco State University. Shortly after, he pursued another Master's degree, this time in Social Work at San José State University. This kind of comprehensive education prepared him for a variety of professions, and he began his career in Santa Clara County in 2001. Later, he became a children's counselor, analyst for the Office of Cultural Competency, and he currently works in social services as a program manager.

Don Long has achieved much throughout his 40 years of living in Santa Clara County, and he believes that it is important to give back to the people who work behind the scenes. He has volunteered to work on emergency response teams, volunteered in the PTA at his children's school, remained involved in his homeowners' association, served as a board member of several non-profit organizations, and is very involved in civic service overall. Long has worked in public service for over 20 years, focusing on child counseling, policy and data analysis, culturally proficient services, language access, racial and ethnic disparities, and equity work, along with office and program management. He works efficiently with diverse community members and is dedicated to breaking institutional barriers, while striving for equal access and human rights protections. Among his many talents and skills, Long is trilingual in Vietnamese, Mandarin and English, skilled in photography, and adept at technical support. His coworkers describe him as being analytical, a great communicator, and skilled facilitator. He is also appreciated for his writing skills and his expertise in data and policy analysis.

Grounded in honesty and humility, Long's 10-year plan includes aspirations of running for a city council seat after retirement and he is committed to continuing to engage in social justice efforts to remain a voice for those whose voices are rarely heard. He emphasizes the importance of giving back and shares, "As an immigrant, I am a beneficiary of a lot of people behind the scenes that I might not be aware of, right, that's been there to help, and a lot of what I'm doing, I'm giving back. I benefit from those invisible hands that helped." His passion is powerful and his commitment to community and advocacy inspires the best in others. Long leads by example, encouraging others to work from a space of humility, living by the following guiding wisdom: know yourself, be honest with yourself, be humble.

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immigrants work hard, they pay taxes, contribute to the fabric of America, they add to the cultural diversity - linguistic, music, stories that are shared within their culture.

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# Surprise in the Night

By Victor Landaverde



# BYRON

“You cannot sacrifice some for the better of all.”

Mr. Suarez would like to teach others how to improve communication skills and be assertive leaders in the community.



**S**ome folks become lawyers because it is a profession that runs in the family, others find their way into the legal field through a different path. Byron Abraham Suarez, Deputy District Attorney for the County of Santa Clara, remembers that he and his sister served as translators for their parents, like many immigrant children, both even trying to explain contracts and other legal documents to their Spanish speaking parents. This early exposure to legal documents and legal issues left an indelible mark on Suarez as a child.

Suarez, a native of Guatemala who came to the U.S. at a young age, grew up in East San Jose where he and his family faced many challenges. However, he tends to focus on the positive aspects of his life. Though he lived in extremely dense housing with his family, two families of eight and seven sharing a two-bedroom apartment, Suarez remembers being surrounded by a tight-knit community at home and in his neighborhood. In his opinion, it is important for children to have safety, security, and peace, and collective living arrangements are more likely to provide that.

He was able to overcome the trauma of his immigration journey, adapted to this country's way of life as a teenager, and subsequently pursued higher education and served in the military. Suarez is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. He eventually went to law school and now as a Community Prosecutor for the Community

Prosecution Unit, he contributes to reducing juvenile crime rates by connecting families with resources and informing them about their rights. He is also committed to informing the community about language access rights and resources. Mr. Suarez would like to teach others how to improve communication skills and be assertive leaders in the community.

With these achievements he continues to contribute not only to his family, but also to the community where he grew up and now serves. Suarez and the Community Prosecution Unit contribute to the community by upholding the law and by taking a more progressive stance to ensure equal access to justice.

Suarez is grateful to the local youth he encounters for reviving and strengthening his love of his native culture that comes from the indigenous peoples of Guatemala—the Mayans. His family also preserves their traditional Guatemalan cuisine and other integral cultural aspects of their Guatemalan identity. He is grateful for his family's support and his Christian faith, that helped him navigate coming to a new country, the military, and his educational journey, which culminated with him entering the legal field.

East San Jose, his family, the tight-knit community that looked out for him and his sister shaped who Suarez is today and he is grateful to be able to give back to that community every day through his work.



# Spark of Generational Dreams

By Naz Nawabi

## AMY MARTINEZ

**T**he American Dream looks very different in reality...

Amy Martinez came to the United States on a bus as a small child with her family. They all had misconceptions about life here, believing that everyone would be wealthy. Amy's parents came to the United States to seek a better life for their children, so Amy and her siblings have a strong sense of responsibility to not disappoint them. In fact, Martinez hopes to make her parents proud by having a respected career after graduating from college. She is goal-oriented, confident, and highly motivated to achieve her realistic, redefined American Dream.

Martinez is first in her family to go to college, and like many others who are oldest children in their own families, she is taking on different responsibilities to support her siblings and parents. She resides in a multigenerational home, a two-bedroom apartment, with her parents and two siblings. Her great passion is working with children. She loves babysitting as well as working as a camp counselor. All this work is performed while Martinez studies to obtain her esthetician license. After she becomes an esthetician, she hopes to continue her education in a nursing school. Martinez has already taken speech therapy training to enhance her work with children and further improve her own English skills.

Martinez also needs to practice speaking Spanish more often, while her parents struggle with English. They help each other and Martinez's school also provided language access support through a program for immigrant students who teach their parents to improve their English skills. Being raised in the U. S. for most of her life, Amy has lost touch with some of her cultural values and that also affected her Spanish language proficiency, especially when she speaks with her elders. But the Martinez family socializes during holidays, organizing large parties for Christmas, New Year, and during other occasions to keep their traditions alive. Through her maternal relatives, Amy has learned the value of being family-oriented and is grateful for this teaching.

Martinez is also grateful that she can work to help her family. The pandemic has slowed down the processing of immigration relief applications, including her younger sister's DACA application, and in the meantime, she cannot lawfully work without proper work authorization. She knows that her neighborhood is full of stories like hers, and she wishes that resources were allocated equitably to provide relief, improve her neighborhood, renovate homes, and clean up the local sidewalks and streets to allow her family and others to experience more of their American Dreams... She has observed that many homes in her neighborhood in San Jose appear run-down. Systemic changes are needed to address inequities and uplift low-income communities.

Amy has not been directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but she has seen many impacts in our local communities. She volunteers at schools that organize food drives to help affected community members and provide temporary relief. Martinez hopes that her story, her work, and determination can inspire her siblings and other first-generation immigrants whose life is not easy. She believes that they will also find motivation to pursue their own dreams and strive to make their communities better. In the end, she emphasized that we should be bold as we continue to move forward, adding "live your life, because life is short."

**"Live your life because life is short."**



# For the Greater Good

By Britany Gutierrez

**F**arah Barnia was born in Iran and immigrated to the United States by herself in May of 1978 at the age of sixteen. In her homeland, she lived with her parents and five siblings until the age of five, when her mom passed away. Her father considered himself a nationalist whose main goal was to make his country better. For that reason, he was heavily involved in aiding the underdeveloped states. Ms. Barnia traveled to those regions with her father where she was exposed to the suffering of her Iranian people. By witnessing this suffering, she realized that something needed to be changed. This inspired her to study agricultural engineering in order to develop rural areas of the country. Her commitment to agricultural engineering, along with being influenced by the American media, led to her decision to immigrate to the United States to advance her studies.

Ms. Barnia eventually received advanced degrees in agricultural engineering and communications from universities in the United States. From there, she became very involved in her community. Over the years and decades, she created an Iranian community resource center and she served on boards of several non-profit agencies that focus on women, education, and human rights. She held her first job for eleven years where she learned so much about social services offered by the U.S. to help refugees and immigrants resettle into their new environment. Unfortunately, she was eventually laid off from this job due to her exposing corruption that had been going on in the organization. After overcoming this difficult situation, Ms. Barnia came to the realization that she did not want to participate in corporate greed and was determined to put the well-being of others before her own.

**“The most important thing that we have is ourselves. If we can promote and develop our own abilities, we can overcome a lot of weaknesses in our lives.”**

Since then, she has worked with the Santa Clara County government for a span of over 20 years at the Social Services Agency, proudly influencing the lives of many clients who have needed support. This kind of work also helps Ms. Barnia to continuously learn and develop. With her ability to speak four languages, along with her unique talents of connecting with people through storytelling, humor, and non-verbal communication, she has made it her most important goal to promote education and self-awareness to everyone she meets.

Farah Barnia believes that although nobody is perfect, we must collectively realize that we are all simply human and that we must strive for peace, justice, and equal opportunities to reach our full potential as a country. With a humble, yet powerful presence, her stern voice lets you know that she is both determined and driven. In her words, “The most important thing that we have is ourselves. If we can promote and develop our own abilities, we can overcome a lot of weaknesses in our lives.” Her story and dreams for the future motivate others to keep pushing forward.

# Finding Yourself

By Guadalupe Vazquez Mendoza

**LINDA  
YAN**

“College is the time where I learned to be proud of it and feel very comfortable and feel very safe about folks around me who can see me for who I am” – experience living in county

Linda Yan was born in Beijing, China and immigrated to the United States as an international student at the age of fourteen. Initially, she planned on completing her education in the U.S. and going back to her homeland. However, she stayed in the U. S. to pursue higher education at Stanford University and is now a graduate student.

Yang's first arrival to the U.S. was in Connecticut where she attended a private boarding school. During this time, she began to recognize the prevailing racism and classism in her school and noticed how culturally and socially different the U.S. was compared to China. While living in Beijing, though there was government censorship, Linda and her family still felt safe to talk about politics and to criticize their government. In reflecting on this, she also noted how many communities living in the U. S. may not be comfortable asking for government aid. Such differences and the impact of how people engage with services might have factored in to why Yang is passionate about technology being used ethically to help immigrant communities, including those within the criminal justice system and those held in immigrant detention.

Throughout her schooling, she also observed that Asian people were forcefully grouped into an Asian American identity even though Asian people who did not grow up here might have very different experiences. Yang was challenged to break away from many stereotypes that often made her feel reduced or tokenized. This caused a struggle and differences in how she saw herself versus how others perceived her. Overtime, she became temporarily unaccepting of her culture and invalidated her own lived experiences. Fortunately, she used music and theater as a way to make friends. She considers music a common language that can be used to connect and communicate with others from all over the world. She remains passionate about music to this day.

Yang's transition from Connecticut to Santa Clara County played a significant role in her becoming unapologetically herself. She became involved with Santa Clara County government via an internship while she was a college student. Gaining experience in non-profit organizations, collaboratives, and community outreach spaces that focus on human rights fueled her passion early on. As she spent more time in the county, she began to feel safe and comfortable embracing her identity because of the large Asian population and their influence. She found ways of keeping her traditions and culture alive, especially as it centers around food like Dumplings and Hotpot. In reflecting on her experiences, she states: “Coming here I am much more able to embrace my own life. For example, I used to feel self-conscious about bringing a thermos to school during the winter. [Here] there are more people like me, and people accept me for it. I am very shamelessly loving stir fry and not wanting ice cold water in the winter. That is part of who I am. College is the time where I learned to be proud of it and feel very comfortable and feel very safe about folks around me who can see me for who I am.” Part of embracing her life in that way includes sharing that with others. Yang hosts dumpling parties with her friends and family; an assembly line is formed where people fill, fold, and pinch the dumplings, learning how to make them into delicious samples. Like her joy and laughter, her generosity becomes contagious.

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, Yang lived with her parents and experienced both a time of hardship and a time of healing. The responsibility and pressures of being the oldest and only child are relatable and Yang, like many others, grew during this trying time. She engaged in difficult conversations with her parents caused by cultural and generational differences in views and values. Spending more time together as a family, she was able to create a closer relationship with her parents and this became a healing experience for the family. However, her family also experienced financial stress. Her parents own a business in China that supports her grandparents living in China. Throughout the pandemic their business struggled to stay afloat due to tariffs, cost of production, and people no longer buying products. On top of that, her grandfather experienced two strokes and Yang could not go see him due to COVID-19. During the lockdown her house in the U.S. also flooded, and she had to help her parents with insurance and finding a company to fix the flooring. She is also helping her parents apply for citizenship. Linda does this with grace all while also being a student, always finding joy alongside the struggles.

Linda Yang strongly believes in the value of giving back to the community and helping those who have helped us, especially the elderly members of the community. She is a true embodiment of her values: humility, justice, and listening to everyone in the community while also knowing our own boundaries.



# HERLINDA ZAVALA

**H**erlinda Zavala's story is one of passion and determination captured both in her personality and how she maintains her small business in cosmetology while also giving back to her community, family, and friends.

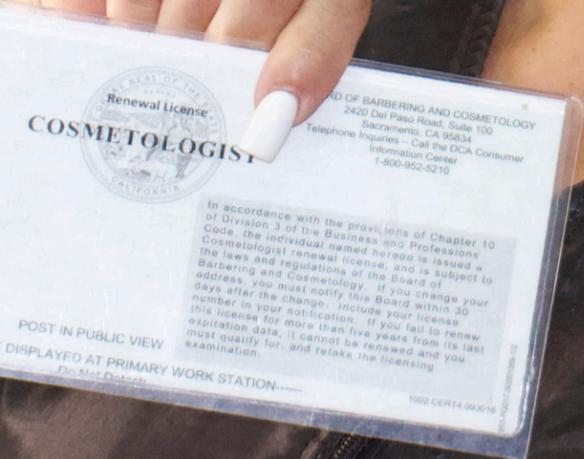
Zavala lives in San Jose, California and migrated to the United States from Zapotitlán Jalisco, Mexico at the age of ten with her family via a temporary two-month tourist visa. She is a single mother of two and owns a hair salon in the Willow Glen area of San Jose. She maintains strong ties to her Hispanic culture, and takes pride in how her ancestors taught her to be resilient, hardworking, positive, and nonjudgmental towards others.

While Zavala's culture did not change much after arriving to the United States, she did invest efforts into taking care of herself, emotionally and mentally, in order to take care of her two daughters. It is especially important for Zavala to remain bilingual and bicultural for herself and her daughters. At a young age, Zavala felt she needed to learn English and began taking classes, watching TV shows in English, and practicing the English language with her daughters. Zavala also shared how much the County has helped her by providing language access to resources, including single mom programs, food banks, school supplies for children, community centers, and counseling. Learning English was important for her to improve her communication with her clients, but also to communicate outside her home.

Zavala believes that the cost of renting a home, or a business is a struggle for the community because it is becoming more expensive. It is increasingly more difficult for people to live, and there is more pressure to work more hours to maintain a liveable salary that provides for personal and household expenses. Zavala also shared some thoughts on how this relates to the struggle of maintaining a business in this economy.

She has owned a small hair salon in Willow Glen for 17 years, since 2005, where she has worked and shared her passion of being a stylist. She draws attention as she walks in the room with her strong presence of beauty, her fashionable attire makes a statement, and her well-kept hair defines her sense in cosmetology and passion for the beauty industry. Confident, she now returns the same opportunity for those who want to become stylists by creating an environment in which people feel safe to express themselves. She continues to encourage her community to pursue cosmetology and gives back to her community by encouraging women to stand up for social justice and to make a career for themselves. She also takes it a step further by providing resources for proper hygiene to people who are dependent on drug use, for the homeless and unhoused, or those who lack money to pay for haircuts.

Zavala has several thoughts and recommendations for improving the quality of life for immigrants living in Santa Clara County. For example, there are multiple immigration benefits, but there is a significant backlog on processing cases, so it typically takes years to finish the process, putting thousands in limbo with regard to status. The cost of adjusting immigration status should be affordable for immigrant communities. Also, incarcerated populations and those with criminal records should be given the chance to purge those records and adjust their immigration status. In order to achieve this "You must keep pushing forward" and Zavala plans to keep doing exactly that.



## Empowering Communities Through Small Business in Cosmetology

By Carmen Ochoa

# Beauty in the Struggle

By Maria Montoya

## KATHYA VAZQUEZ

**K**athya Vazquez was born in Zacatecas, Mexico and immigrated to the United States at the age of three alongside with her parents. During her early childhood in the US, she attended preschool and kindergarten. After that, her family had to move back to Mexico, and she continued her education there. Upon arriving in the United States for the second time, the Vazquez family had to adjust to the American way of life once again. She talks with strong emotions about the difficulties transitioning into the American educational system after experiencing third and fourth grade in Mexico. Vazquez took ESL classes and subsequently graduated from high school. Despite barriers posed by her immigration status she still found motivation to enroll in college and earned her Associates Degree at West Valley College in Criminal Justice and Liberal Arts. Vazquez was able to deepen her interest in social justice by transferring to CSU East Bay where she received her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. Continuing her education and obtaining degrees helped her bridge the inequity gap that limited her family's economic and social mobility. Kathya is currently able to assist individuals with disabilities as a part-time Registered Behavioral Technician. She finds fulfillment in helping and supporting others, especially those who need it most.

Growing up, Kathya and her family struggled to find stability as they learned to navigate through various systems in a new country. At a young age, she took on the responsibility of translating and advocating for her parents. Her parents never learned to speak fluent

English but have aspired to keep improving by taking free English classes. She describes her experience with growing up in a crowded household and reflects on the struggle of people who have economic and language barriers. Having experienced the many challenges inspired her to be proactive and utilize her creativity. She is now openly talking about her childhood, metaphoric and real borders and her immigration experiences. Vazquez is creative, innovative and determined to find solutions with her entrepreneurial spirit. She founded a small business in a cosmetic industry to support herself and her family in 2018. This endeavor was a labor of love and a reflection of how passionate she is about her job. She really enjoys networking and building relationships with her clients. Times are hard and economic recovery slow, but she hopes to have her own business location soon and aspires to offer trainings to help others interested in cosmetology to learn skills that she practices. With her compassion and determination, she radiates positive energy and motivates others who also struggle. Her path is inspiring to those who have crossed a variety of borders, and those who remain affected by the limitations the U. S. immigration law. Her story is a great example how immigrants find their own solutions, stay resilient and empathetic, countering the inhumane and exclusionary policies.

Even though Kathya came to the U. S. as a child and her memories are limited, together with her family she is emersed in both cultures and celebrating both Mexican and American holidays. It is of special significance for the Vazquez family to preserve their native culture while respecting the multicultural environment in Santa Clara County. An example of a family tradition is the Santo Santiago celebration that unifies their family together and enriches the diversity of cultural life in our region.

**“All that people want is to work and provide money for their families here or in Mexico.”**

# From War to Optimistic Future

By Juan Beltran



JEAN

**J**ean was born in Zambia, but his parents are from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Jean's parents migrated from Congo to Zambia in 1993 and stayed there until they immigrated to the United States. There were extreme racial inequalities, war conflicts, and economic turmoil in Zambia at the time Jean was born in the year 2000. Even though he was a small child he experienced all of that. As much as he tried to enjoy his childhood, that was not truly possible, and his parents consistently warned him to be careful and to stay safe. Jean was personally affected by racial injustice in Zambia, where he never felt wanted in any environment because of his parents' nationality. Eventually, his mom applied for asylum in the US when they arrived. The family told their compelling story to immigration officers requesting protection, but the asylum process in the U. S. is long and complicated. Jean's mother had to bring numerous relevant documenters to obtain the status. They received the approval in 2019, just before the pandemic took a hold of the entire world.

When Jean first arrived in the U. S. he enrolled in school and as a student he had to translate for his parents. He continued to do that for many years, including at their workplace Applebee's. Jean also worked there and experienced discrimination and exploitation himself. Most of the time, Jean was working full time, and his shifts ended past 1:00 AM, while he had to wake up early in the morning to go to school. He is now working at The San Jose Conservation Corp + Charter School.

Jean is a very intellectual, independent individual who takes initiative and motivates others. Even as a young child, he learned English quickly by reading magazines and newspapers and by watching shows in English. This kind of self-learning has helped him to improve his proficiency over time. He is only three credits short of obtaining his high school diploma. Quote: "when you have education, you can change the world"

Jean is very devoted to his community. His communal spirit is reflected in his work aimed at improving society as a whole. He works on cleaning streets and maintaining local public parks. What gives him special gratification is the process of planting trees to beautify and protect our communities by addressing environmental issues. Jean wants to continue his education after graduating from high school. His goal is to major in civil engineering, as it relates to what he is doing currently and provides an avenue for profound social change to address inequities in building and access to housing. Jean is already involved in affordable housing projects where small lots are used to build tiny houses, like the unit he is currently living in. Jean received his driver's permit recently and is hoping to obtain his driver's license soon. He is a very practical person with many skills and talents. It was refreshing to hear that in the meantime he was also working on his car all by himself by painting it and adding some modifications. He is very passionate for soccer and finds it empowering. This sport has been a part of his life since he was a child.

Currently, Jean is happy with his personal life and optimistic about how his future is unfolding. He is at one of his happiest moments. It is very inspiring to witness how refugees and asylees who experienced trauma as children can grow up to be so optimistic and resilient.

Jean is involved in affordable housing projects where small lots are used to build tiny houses.



# Running towards the Future

By Britany Gutierrez



“

I'd like to be the person that people say "I want to be more like him..." staying humble in a competitive environment is not always the best, you want to stand out.

”

## Kareem

**K**areem Khogali is inspirational as someone who came to the United States in pursuit of a better life, has had success while offering grace and humility in everything he does. He is originally from the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt where he lived with his mother and younger sister until 2017. Khogali grew up in an apartment residing in a compound with a tightknit community and went to school with the same children all throughout elementary and high school. It would have been difficult for him to pursue higher education to become a civil engineer in Egypt due to costs and university's high admission standard so they moved to San Jose in 2017.

"My vision of the U.S. was all from the movies I watched. So, I expected to see a lot of white people, tall buildings, locker-rooms, and everything changed my first day of school," said Khogali. One of his struggles was getting used to the continuous use of the English language and his heavy accent. To improve his English skills, he practiced by talking to himself and singing along to songs with English lyrics. Mr. Khogali started his junior year of high school at Mount Pleasant and that is where he was introduced to what would be one of his strongest passions, track and field.

Back home he had played soccer and raced with his friends for fun. Khogali continued to be a student athlete at DeAnza College due to its well-known track program, even though it was a 40-minute commute from his home. He later became the captain of the men's team. At DeAnza he also became a part of the Student Athlete Association Committee where he advocated for funding and became an activist. His academic and athletic involvement helped him become the recipient of the 2020 Sankofa Award at DeAnza College selected by the Black Faculty, Staff and Administrators Network (BFSA) along with a scholarship.

Currently, Mr. Khogali is a student athlete at San Jose State University on his path to graduate with his bachelor's degree in civil engineering in Spring 2023. He holds an internship with the Valley Transportation Authority and is working as a security guard. Although he is busy contributing to school and community, he still makes time to preserve his culture through the practice of the Arabic language and Muslim traditions and holidays like Ramadan and Eid. "I like to be the person that people say, "I want to be more like him", said Khogali. He lives by the words of his long-time coach, "Be your own Kareem", and continues to do the best he can, leaving his mark everywhere he goes.



# Bringing a seed of knowledge

By Juan Coronado

SABUHI

**W**hen she immigrated from Pakistan, Siddique moved to the United States for higher education as she was already a university graduate from Pakistan. Later, she was able to become a medical technician at the former Regional Medical Center in San Jose, California. Working as a medical technician allowed her to find her passion of helping others and to improve the community around her. Since then, she has volunteered for faith and interfaith organizations for decades. Siddique has become a leader of a local Muslim organization, served on the board of several non-profits, labor council, and as a commissioner of the Santa Clara County Human Rights Commission for 8 years. Sabuhi is also politically engaged. She ran for the District Nine seat on the San Jose City Council in 2018, visited jails as a commissioner, and joined others to address police brutality, human rights violations, homelessness. When she ran for the District Nine city council seat in 2018, she set up a record to be the first Muslim woman in a hijab to run for political office. She is now serving as a president of Pinehurst Neighborhood Residents Association for the last 8 years.

When holding these types of positions, someone would need to have a fierce character to fight for what they want and what they believe in. But if someone were ever to meet Sabuhi, they would be surprised of how kind and gentle she is. Sabuhi's voice was filled with confidence and thoughtfulness which made the surrounding environment as calm as a koi pond. Above all, Sabuhi is one of the most selfless souls, because she will always be there to help the little guy and keep supporting them throughout their growth. Santa Clara County is very fortunate to have such an intelligent, selfless and thoughtful woman on their side.

Sabuhi also has many hobbies which loves to share with family and members of the community. Sabuhi loves wearing cultural dresses because they show absolute beauty in the most subtle way, and she hopes to collect many more in the future. While wearing her dress, she enjoys pairing it up with jewelry which includes earrings and a nose piercing. Another hobby that she has picked up in her free time is experimenting with food from different parts of the world. During the pandemic she was able to show off this hobby even more because that's when her whole family was together, and her family agrees that every meal she makes is made with passion and absolute love.

Besides her work in the county, family and in the larger community, she has also supported her husband in his business endeavors, such as his mortgage company. Between their hard work, they have been able to retire early and help their children achieve their own professional goals. These goals were accomplished through their perseverance, courage, and work ethic, but to complete these goals, challenges were also present on their pathways. In the 1983 recession, Sabuhi with her husband moved to California for work. They had a difficult time during the first six months, because they didn't have enough money and they both had to work extra hours to overcome that obstacle. She was able to learn budgeting skills, back in Pakistan and to further develop them here in the United States. Sabuhi transferred these skills to her children. Another challenge that the Siddique family faced was the fear and discrimination during the 1991 war on Iraq, and especially, after 9/11. During that time, Siddique was always cautious about her movement and her traditional attire that includes a scarf.

Since coming to the United States, Siddique observed integration of the mainstream American culture within her family. She is also a mother of four, who have all been successful and well-integrated in Silicon Valley. She had challenges when raising her children and teaching them the values of both Pakistani and American culture. She knew that her children would be accustomed to the Western culture more because they were immersed into it daily. To this day, her children are still close to their Pakistani culture, but they feel more American at the end of the day.

Siddique's immigration story is one of many that describe success, dedication and commitment. It is truly inspiring to many. In this world there is not as much compassion or empathy as there should be for our fellow humans that is why it is important to "help one another, be nice, show compassion and necessary respect" and "to always love your neighbors". Siddique's story is hope displayed in its highest glory that will inspire present and future immigrants of the United States.

**“Help one another, be nice, show compassion and respect is always necessary”**



# Brown Women Leading

By Natali Zepeda

# TERESA MARQUEZ

**T**eresa Marquez story is one of hope, inspiration and hard work. She has been with East Side Union High School District for twenty-six years. She is the highest-ranking Latina in the East Side Union High School District who paves the way for opportunities in the public education for other women of color. Mrs. Marquez graduated from UC Santa Cruz with a degree in mathematics. More importantly, she continues the work of making significant changes to support our most vulnerable students and their families tirelessly even now as she has been diagnosed with cancer. She is the first one to show up to work and the last one to leave. She allows room for her staff to show creativity and make policy changes. She is willing to help everyone reach their potential

Mrs. Marquez was born in Mexico, Penjamo Guanajuato. Her mother attempted to cross the border into the US for the first time when Teresa was one year old. They were caught by the border patrol. Although Teresa has no memory of the situation, her mother shares this story often during family gatherings, expressing the overwhelming feeling of fear, disrespect shown by the officers who scolded her about her decision to bring her children to experience this. Mrs. Marquez's mother crossed the border for the second time and ended up settling with her family in East Los Angeles. Their family shared a one-bedroom apartment with multiple family members.

Mrs. Marquez has eight siblings--three born in Mexico and six born in the US. When she remembers her childhood home, she describes it being full of joy, food, colors, and music. Although there were multiple people living in her home it never felt crowded and she was raised to appreciate and value family more than anything. Teresa's family learned to adapt quickly to the new country and their optimism, hard work, and humility opened many opportunities for them to overcome the barriers they faced. These multiple barriers included housing, financial instability and English language proficiency.

Mrs. Marquez received her permanent resident status when she was nine years old. As soon as the members of the family received their green cards, her father made it a custom to visit and spend every summer in Mexico, Guanajuato to not forget where they came from and to preserve their culture. It has been of critical importance to her family to keep their native Spanish language. She is very proud of her two daughters both being fluent in Spanish. It is her passion to draw inspiration from her strong family ties and the work she has been doing in the public education system. Additionally, serving ESUHSD students and their families has continuously provided great motivation over the years. Her work in the District is strongly aligned with her personal and professional values. She describes herself as an overachiever with an open heart to continue to learn and to help all students succeed in achieving their goals.

Quote- In her own words: "I will continue to roll my sleeves up and do the work not changing who I am, a brown immigrant girl with curly hair, girl whose presence cannot be ignored."

Teresa Marquez's biggest dreams are that her two daughters can carry on her passion for education and the importance of the family. It is important for her to see that they are also proud of who they are and to contribute to the community. Teresa's presence cannot be ignored when she enters any room she represents where she comes from and her values. She never shies away from the opportunity to speak her truth.



# Discovering New Horizons

By Madeline Qu

Tom Chiu is a first-generation immigrant who has lived in the Bay Area for more than 40 years. He is currently a resident of San Jose. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Chiu came to the U.S. on a F1 student Visa after graduating from high school.

Tom later graduated from San José State University. His career path has been steady and consistent at Santa Clara County's building department, where he has been employed for more than 18 years. His rich experience in engineering and collaboration with developers has been instrumental in the completion of several housing projects for the County. He has worked on building low-income housing, medical facilities, and many other projects. Chiu especially appreciates the County's diverse labor force; many of his co-workers are bilingual, and they work together to build a strong community.

Tom is a self-driven, honest, and kind person. Even after retiring from the County, he has continued his career in engineering. We learned that as a caring neighbor, he has good relationships with people, and when someone in his community has challenges, he is happy to help. Chiu is especially proud of his daughters. They all graduated from college and live independent lives. He strongly believes in the value of education, because higher education was critical in his own life and his profession is a significant element of who he is today.

Reflecting fondly on when he became a parent, Tom shared that they decided to move to a different area of the county to ensure that their children would receive a better education. He emphasized that his own parents also valued education highly. In

Hong Kong, social class determined one's life and it was not easy for him to come to the U.S. since his parents had five children and were not rich, but they did their best to find opportunities for him. After coming to the U.S., Tom had the burden of studying hard and working hard to support himself. As a student visa holder, he faced many labor restrictions, but he did his best to lighten the financial burden on his family by mentoring others, working in student cafeterias, and in restaurants. Tom says that the Chinese culture and its values that he brought to the U.S. helped him to overcome many challenges. The English skills that he brought from Hong Kong also allowed him to adapt to the environment faster. Tom believes firmly that immigrants of different backgrounds contribute to making the U.S. a stronger and more diverse country. However, the dominant media rarely highlights the contributions of immigrants.

Tom's personal experiences made him independent and resilient as a person. Unlike people who come to the U.S. with their family members, he had to deal with the hard times on his own. Over the years, he has stayed grounded in his culture, and in his free time, Tom's family celebrates Chinese traditions like QingMing, August Moon and Lunar New Year Festivals.

The policy changes that Tom hopes to see are primarily related to a system that ensures faster processing of immigration cases. Tom found out that the government has enough resources, but sometimes people in the community don't know how and where to find them. When help comes, many people receive it too late. One thing that frustrated Tom was that he worked hard to provide for his daughters' future, but when they needed federal student aid from the government, they did not qualify for it. In the end, Tom hopes that new immigrants will do their best to understand the U.S. system in order to claim benefits that they deserve.

Tom lives his life by the following words of wisdom: "Be self-driven, never accept failure, never give up." He models that determination by setting goals, working hard, and leading by example in the care and respect he shows for others.

**"I'd like to promote fairness to immigrants; good stories are not published and only the negative ones are reported. When the truth is shared, communities can begin healing and shift towards change."**

# Striving and thriving -Laos Dreamer

By Karla Venegas Garcia

Robert is a first-generation Laotian refugee who has reached his American Dream of owning his home, being active in his children's lives and saving for his children's future. He has overcome many obstacles in order to be where he is now—working as a Chief Of Construction Services. He began his journey here in San Jose, where he attended primary schooling and then started working when he was 16 years old to help provide for his family. As a first college graduate in his family, he completed his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering with an emphasis in wireless communication from Cal State Sacramento. Soon after his graduation, a friend who owns a consulting firm introduced him to the job and he has been working as a consultant for 15 years now. Robert is very proud of his team who he oversees in projects together with other managers and has devoted to support the rest of his families achieve success and stability too.

Robert began his journey to the United States at the age of five due to the war and terrible conditions in his homeland. His family escaped to Thailand, where they waited for months in a refugee camp. Robert remembered that they lived and traveled with no resources and in poor conditions. Fortunately, they started their new life in San Jose, California where they had an American family as their sponsor. They were able to find housing, access public benefits such as food stamps and other supports.

Robert remembered the day that his mother struggled with understanding how to use money in the United States. He remembered the pain he saw in her eyes not knowing how to pay a cashier to feed her starving child. Robert is very proud of his decisions to focus on financial literacy within his own family. This was a defining moment in Robert life where he committed to ensuring that he made sound financial decisions to support his family.

Robert learned at an early age that it is very important to be unselfish, to help other people without expecting anything in return. As a Buddhist, he describes how in his community everyone at the temple lays a hand, demonstrating that there is a generous amount of help for one another. Robert is not only proud of his Buddhist community, but also equally proud of the immigrant and refugee communities, stating enthusiastically, "they don't give up, every speed bump is part of the process. They push through all these barriers to achieve their goals... strong willed."

"Immigrants do not get enough credit for the hard work that they do. There is a bad connotation about the word immigrant itself, but that doesn't mean anything. The word shouldn't be bad."





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