

43RD ANNUAL

Asian American Coalition of Chicago



Lunar New Year Celebration 2026



ASIAN + AMERICAN

February 28, 2026

Marriott Marquis Chicago



Hosted by the Chinese American Community



aacchicago



aaccgala

#2026lunarnewyearchi

Asian + American

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Asian + American

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The Asian American Coalition of Chicago
presents

The 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration
“Asian + American”

Saturday, February 28, 2026

Marriott Marquis
2121 South Prairie Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60616

Hosted by the Chinese American Community

Co-Chairs

Dr. Karen Eng
Grace Chan-McKibben
Anne Shaw

Celebrity Presenters

Nancy Loo and Brian Cheung

2026 Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Awardee

Dr. Manjeet Singh Chawla

2026 Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Awardee

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Asian + American

GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRS



Gung Hay Fat Choy!

On behalf of the 2026 Asian American Coalition of Chicago Planning Committee, it is our pleasure to welcome you and your organization to the **43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration**. Our mission is to organize and promote equal opportunities in government, education, economic development, and international affairs to empower all Asian Americans.

The AACC, founded in 1983, is represented by over 16 Asian cultures including the Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Vietnamese communities. An event held on this grand of a scale only once a year, the Asian Lunar New Year Celebration is the largest annual celebration of its type here in the Midwest, which helps celebrate these rich heritages and diverse histories. The communities take turns hosting the event on a rotating basis and this year; the Chinese American community is thrilled to take the lead. To celebrate the accomplishments of an amazing year as well as highlight the hope of a united future, this year of the horse theme is titled “**Asian + American**”.

Asian Americans are the fastest growing multicultural segment of the US population with buying power projected to reach \$1.9 trillion by 2026. Over the past three decades, this event has established itself as Chicagoland’s premier Pan-Asian event of its kind drawing over a thousand participants annually.

Thank you to the Board of Directors, Chinese American host planning committee, AACC planning committee, sponsors, government officials, family, and friends for your collaboration and partnership for a successful gala.

Congratulations to the Pakistani American community for taking the gavel as next year’s host community!

With respect,



Dr. Karen Eng



Grace Chan-McKibben



Anne Shaw

Co-Chairs - 2026 Chinese American Community
Asian American Coalition of Chicago

Asian + American

AACC 2026 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Drummers Lead Audience into Ballroom

Color Guard Posting of Colors

Singing of The National Anthem by Xiao Chen

Introduction of Emcees

Moment of Silence for Veterans

Introduction of AACC Board and Feeding of the Lions

VIP Greetings

Welcome by AACC President Anne Shaw

Welcome by Gala Co-Chair Dr. Karen Eng

Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award

Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award

Dinner & Dessert

Dinner performances by the Midwest Asian Health Association Qipao Team

Dinner videos: In Memoriam and TAFF Asian+American

Performance by Special Guest: Shin Lim

2026 Exemplary Community Service Awards

2026 Youth Who Excels Awards

Passing of the Gavel to the Pakistani Community

Closing Remarks by Gala Co-Chairs

Grace Chan-McKibben, Dr. Karen Eng, Anne Shaw

Close of Program



MENU

~ FIRST COURSE ~

Asian Noodle Salad

with carrots, green onion, sesame, sugar snap peas,
crispy wonton, spicy peanut dressing

~ ENTRÉE COURSE ~

Braised Sirloin and Miso Glazed Salmon,

bamboo rice, peppers, jus

or

Vegetarian Option

Crispy Tofu,

bamboo rice, stir fried vegetables

~ DESSERT COURSE ~

Matcha Crème Brûlée

Asian + American

SPONSORS

(As of 2/26/2026)

Thank you for the loyal support of our sponsors!



芝城華埠停車場有限公司
CHINATOWN PARKING CORP.



PROCLAMATIONS AND FRIENDS OF THE AACC

TAMMY DUCKWORTH
ILLINOIS

COMMITTEES
ARMED SERVICES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION
FOREIGN RELATIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

February 28, 2026

Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 W. Cermak Road, 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60616

Greetings Friends:

I am pleased to welcome you to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's (AACC) 2026 Lunar New Year Gala, hosted this year by the Chinese American Community.

This year's theme of "Asian + American" coincides with the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This theme highlights how we have always been a nation of immigrants and that Asian American stories are the American story. It is more important than ever to celebrate our diversity, and I want to thank the AACC for all you do to champion the AANHPI community.

This year, we celebrate the Year of the Horse, representing strength, vitality and independence. Through these celebrations, I hope the Asian American community will feel empowered, energized and joyous.

Again, we thank you for your remarkable contribution to this community. My very best to you all on this special occasion as we celebrate the Year of the Horse.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

SUITE 524
HART BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-2854

SUITE 3900
KILCZYNSKI FEDERAL BUILDING
230 S. DEARBORN STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60604
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8 SOUTH OLD STATE CAPITOL PLAZA
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701
(217) 528-6124

EURMA C. HAYES CENTER
441 EAST WILLOW STREET
CARBONDALE, IL 62901
(618) 677-7000

SUITE 2
1823 2ND AVENUE
ROCK ISLAND, IL 61201
(309) 606-7060

SUITE 460
23 PUBLIC SQUARE
BELLEVILLE, IL 62220
(618) 722-7070

Asian + American

RICHARD J. DURBIN
ILLINOIS
DEMOCRATIC WHIP

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

February 28, 2026

Dear Friends:

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's (AACC) 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Gala. This year's gathering, hosted by the Chinese American Community, is a special opportunity to celebrate the rich culture and contributions of Asian Americans across our country.

This year's Lunar New Year Celebration focuses on the theme "Asian + American." This theme honors the 250th anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence and highlights the integral role Asian immigrants have played in shaping our nation's history and future. For more than four decades, the AACC has united diverse communities to strengthen cultural traditions, promote understanding, and celebrate the vibrant role Asian Americans play in shaping our shared future.

As we welcome the Year of the Horse, let us celebrate the values of unity, resilience and bold transformation. Again, I would like to extend my warmest wishes to tonight's attendees for your dedication to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago. Congratulations on all your efforts and achievements.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304
(202) 224-2152

230 S. DEARBORN STREET
SUITE 3892
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(312) 353-4952

525 SOUTH EIGHTH STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62703
(217) 492-4062

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CARBONDALE, IL 62901
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durbin.senate.gov

Asian + American

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FAX: (847) 413-1965

www.krishnamoorthi.house.gov

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE STRATEGIC
COMPETITION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
& CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY:
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SUBCOMMITTEE:
ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENERGY POLICY,
& REGULATORY AFFAIRS

PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE

SUBCOMMITTEE:
THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

February 28, 2026

Asian American Coalition of Chicago
2249 W. Berwyn Avenue
Chicago, IL 60625

Dear Friends,

It brings me great pleasure to extend my best wishes to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago on your 43rd annual Lunar New Year Gala, hosted this year by the Chinese American community. This occasion provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the Asian American community and its rich cultural heritage here in Illinois. I wish all your members health, success, and prosperity this Lunar New Year.

Thank you for all the work that you do, and best wishes for a terrific event!

Warmest regards,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Asian + American



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

207 STATE HOUSE
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62706

JB PRITZKER
GOVERNOR

February 28, 2026

Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 West Cermak Road, 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60616

Greetings!

As Governor of the State of Illinois, I am pleased to welcome everyone gathered for the 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Gala hosted by the Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC).

This occasion offers an exciting opportunity for everyone in attendance to join fellow members of your coalition and generate ideas that implement solutions. I hope the Year of the Horse continues to bring opportunities that promote the leadership, strength, and diversity that make Illinois a more enjoyable place.

Illinois is proud to have enjoyed your service to our state. As you reflect on the previous year's accomplishments, I urge you to make plans for the future of your coalition that will build on your past successes. I encourage you to create new goals, both personal and for your communities, in the year to come. The impact we have on one another creates change and puts forth a better tomorrow.

On behalf of the people of Illinois, I offer my best wishes for continued success in all your future endeavors and happy Lunar New Year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JB Pritzker".

Governor JB Pritzker

Asian + American



JULIANA STRATTON
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
STATE OF ILLINOIS

February 20, 2026

Dear friends and honored guests,

I am delighted to extend warm new year greetings to everyone gathered for your 42nd Lunar New Year celebration!

While you are all gathered together, I wanted to recognize the important role you all play in bringing community together. Lunar New Year is a time of renewal, hope, and connection—a moment to honor tradition while looking ahead with optimism and purpose.

Thank you for your leadership, innovation, and service in the Chicago region. Through your commitment to cultural preservation, excellence, and community building, you strengthen not only the Chinese American community but the broader fabric of Illinois. Events like this gala are a testament to the power of coming together to celebrate shared values and collective progress.

As you welcome this new year of the horse, I hope it brings good health, prosperity, and new opportunities for growth and collaboration. Enjoy a joyful evening filled with celebration, connection, and pride.

Happy new year!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliana Stratton".

Juliana Stratton
Lieutenant Governor
State of Illinois

214 State House
Springfield, Illinois 62706
Phone: 217.558.3085
Fax: 217.558.3094
TTY: 800.563.7110

www.ltgov.illinois.gov

555 West Monroe
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Chicago, Illinois 60661
Phone: 312.814.5240
Fax: 312.814.5228

Asian + American



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

KWAME RAOUL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

February 4, 2026

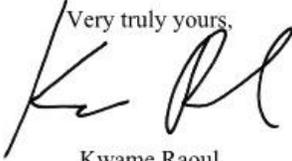
Anne Shaw, President
Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 W. Cermak Rd., 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60616

Dear President Shaw, the AACC Board, Staff, Volunteers, and Friends:

As Illinois Attorney General, I am delighted to welcome you all to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's (AACC) 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration.

For over 40 years, the AACC has been dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of Asian Americans. In these challenging times, the need for your organization's progressive leadership, support, and resources cannot be overstated. Democracy is meaningful only when the contributions of all communities are recognized. I applaud your collective advocacy, as it helps ensure equal access to opportunities and continues to empower Asian Americans throughout Chicagoland and beyond.

I wish you a memorable celebration and many more years of continued success.

Very truly yours,

Kwame Raoul
ATTORNEY GENERAL

500 South Second Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701 • (217) 782-1090 • TTY: (877) 844-5461 • Fax: (217) 782-7046
115 S. LaSalle, Chicago, Illinois 60603 • (312) 814-3000 • TTY: (312) 964-3013-3374 • Fax: (312) 814-3806
601 South University Ave., Carbondale, Illinois 62901 • (618) 529-6400 • TTY: (877) 675-9339 • Fax: (618) 529-6416

Asian + American



SUSANA A. MENDOZA
ILLINOIS STATE COMPTROLLER

February 28, 2026

GREETINGS

As Illinois State Comptroller, it is my sincere pleasure to extend my warmest greetings to everyone gathered for the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Gala: *Asian + American*.

I speak from personal experience when I say that tonight's guests are in for a treat. Each year, this celebration embodies the excellence and rich diversity of the Pan-Asian community in Chicago and beyond. This year's theme honors the 250th Anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence and highlights the vital contributions of Asian immigrants throughout our nation's history.

To this year's gracious hosts, the Chinese American community, I offer my heartfelt appreciation. And to all who have assembled this evening to welcome the Year of the Horse, I extend my best wishes for vitality, freedom, and resilience in the year ahead. Illinois is truly blessed to have such a vibrant and engaged community as yours.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susana A. Mendoza".

Susana A. Mendoza
Illinois State Comptroller

555 West Monroe Street, 1400S-A
Chicago, Illinois 60661-3713
(312) 814-2451

201 State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62706-0001
(217) 782-6000

325 West Adams Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704-1871
(800) 877-8078



Asian + American



Illinois State Treasurer
MICHAEL FRERICHS

February 15, 2026

Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 W. Cermak Road, 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60616

Dear Members of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago,

On behalf of all those who appreciate and support your invaluable contributions, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC) on the occasion of the 43rd Asian Lunar New Year Gala.

For over four decades, the AACC has been a beacon of unity, strength, and advocacy for the Asian American community in Chicago. Your unwavering commitment to promoting cultural awareness, fostering inclusivity, and addressing the unique challenges faced by the Asian American population has enriched the cultural tapestry of our city.

As you celebrate the social energy and bold changes anticipated in the Year of the Horse, it is good to reflect on the tremendous impact of the Asian American community. The AACC has been successful in promoting inclusive and equitable societies that have demonstrated solidarity and is committed to fostering individuality in the sense of belonging and pride within each Asian American community. We look forward to the opportunities that lie ahead in the Year of the Horse.

Once again, best wishes to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago in the "Year of the Horse – 4724."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Frerichs".

Michael Frerichs
Illinois State Treasurer

State Capitol
Room 219
Springfield, IL 62706
Phone: (866) 458-7327
Fax: (217) 785-2777
TTY: (866) 877-6013

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1 East Old State Capitol
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TTY: (866) 877-6013

Asian + American



Theresa Mah • 馬靜儀博士

State Representative, 24th House District • 伊州第二十四区
2108 W. 35th Street, Chicago, IL 60609
Phone: (872) 281-5775

February 28, 2026
Ms. Anne Shaw, President
Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 W. Cermak Road, 2nd Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60616



Dear AACC Friends,

Warm greetings to you all on this joyous occasion of the 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration Gala, hosted by the Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC). I am honored to convey my heartfelt wishes to everyone gathered to celebrate the spirit of unity, resilience, and hope.

The theme, “Asian + American” celebrates the 250th Anniversary of America’s Declaration of Independence and the integral role of Asian immigrants in American history. Over the years, the AACC has played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of community, celebrating the rich heritage of each ethnic group, and recognizing the invaluable contributions of Asian Americans to our nation’s democracy and economy.

After facing the challenges of the past couple of years, it is truly heartening that we can come together to celebrate and reaffirm these enduring values. The Lunar New Year Celebration provides a wonderful opportunity to renew our bonds of friendship and cooperation.

To all the attendees tonight, I extend my warmest wishes for a joyous and prosperous Lunar New Year. May the Year of the Horse bring us power, strength, and good luck as we continue working towards a brighter future.

On behalf of the residents of the 24th District, I express my gratitude for your dedication to uniting our Asian American community. May this celebration be filled with moments of joy, peace, and good fortune.

Best Regards,

Theresa Mah, Ph.D. 馬靜儀博士
Illinois State Representative - 24th District 伊州第二十四区

Asian + American

ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Springfield Office:
237-E Stratton Office Building
Springfield, IL 62706
(217) 782-4194

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Hoan Huynh

State Representative • 13th District

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- ❖ Small Business, Tech Innovation, & Entrepreneurship
- ❖ Child Care Access & Early Childhood

Asian American Coalition of Chicago
2249 W Berwyn Ave
Chicago, IL 60625

February 28, 2026

Dear Friends of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago and Gala Attendees,

Happy Lunar New Year! 2026 is the Year of the Horse, which is a symbol of freedom, strength, and perseverance. I hope that the year ahead brings you and your loved ones great prosperity in happiness and health.

Thank you to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago for bringing people together from all places during this joyous time to ring in the new year. As the first Vietnamese American elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, I am honored to celebrate such an important shared holiday for our communities. May 2026 be a year of collaboration for all of us!

Please enjoy this Lunar New Year Celebration with your friends and families, and have a wonderful Year of the Horse!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hoan Huynh".

State Representative Hoan Huynh, IL-13 House District

Asian + American



NICOLE T. LEE
ALDERWOMAN, 11TH WARD
3659 S. HALSTED ST. 60609
TELEPHONE: (773) 254-6677
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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF CHICAGO
COUNCIL CHAMBER
THIRD FLOOR, CITY HALL
121 NORTH LA SALLE STREET
SUITE 300, OFFICE 31
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

COMMITTEE VICE CHAIRMAN
BUDGET AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
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ECONOMIC, CAPITAL AND
TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATION AND CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
ETHICS AND GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT
FINANCE
POLICE AND FIRE

February 28, 2026

Dear Friends and Community Leaders,

It is my great honor to extend warm greetings to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago as you celebrate your **43rd Annual Lunar New Year Gala**. For more than four decades, the Coalition has served as a powerful and unifying voice for **16 distinct Asian ethnic communities**, strengthening civic participation, cultural understanding, and collective advocacy across the City of Chicago.

Lunar New Year is a time of renewal, reflection, and optimism. As we welcome the **Year of the Horse**, we are reminded of the values it represents—energy, perseverance, resilience, and forward momentum. These qualities are deeply reflected in the Coalition’s work and in the communities you represent, whose contributions continue to enrich Chicago’s social, cultural, and economic fabric.

As Alderman of Chicago’s 11th Ward—home to Chinatown and proud to be the City’s first Asian-majority ward—I am especially grateful for the Coalition’s role in bringing together diverse cultures, languages, and traditions while advancing shared goals of equity, opportunity, and inclusion. Your leadership demonstrates the strength that comes from unity across difference.

On behalf of the residents of the 11th Ward, I wish you a joyful, healthy, and prosperous Lunar New Year. Congratulations on 43 years of impactful service, and thank you for your continued commitment to Chicago’s Asian American communities.

With warmest regards,

Asian + American

BYRON SIGCHO-LÓPEZ
ALDERMAN, 25TH WARD
2100 WEST CERMAK RD
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60608
PHONE: 773-523-4100
E-MAIL: WARD25@CITYOFCHICAGO.ORG



CITY OF CHICAGO
CITY COUNCIL

CITY HALL ROOM 300
121 NORTH LASALLE STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602
PHONE: 773-523-4100

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

HOUSING & REAL ESTATE
(CHAIRMAN)
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COMMITTEE & RULES
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FINANCE
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
& ENERGY
ZONING, LANDMARKS, AND BUILDING
STANDARDS
Revenue (sub-committee)
Youth Employment (sub-committee)

Greetings to the Esteemed and most Honorable, *Asian American Coalition of Chicago* and
Happy Lunar New Year and Year of the Horse!

We are here today in *Celebration of The Asian American Coalition of Chicago - 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration.* Highlighting and tying communities together and in service through community like that of today's event. Gathering here today, from Chinese business leaders, health organizations, local dignitaries, government officials and community leaders. In tying community residents to the best of the best resources within, Chinatown and throughout the City of Chicago and State. We are here today to "Welcome the year of the horse" Thank you for all that you do and the work that will always continue!

Once again, thank you so much for having me, welcoming me with open arms and always building community with one another. To more successful years of this amazing unity and coalition!

yours in service and with love,

25th Ward Alderman Byron Sigcho-Lopez
Chairman on the Committee on Housing and Real Estate



**DUPAGE
COUNTY**

DUPAGE COUNTY BOARD

February 6, 2026

Asian American Coalition of Chicago
Co-Chairs Dr. Karen Eng, Anne Shaw, and Grace Chan McKibben

Dear Friends,

I am honored to attend the Asian American Coalition of Chicago 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration hosted by Chinatown Parking, Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Chinese American Service League, Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, Midwest Asian Health Association, and the Pui Tak Center. I am thrilled to celebrate the Year of the Horse and the 250th anniversary of America's independence with you!

This event is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our successes, see old friends, and make new friends. Let's embrace our hard work and achievements in the Asian American community. We have contributed so much to American history. Together, we can continue to lift each other up and improve the Greater Chicago community. Best wishes for a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucy Chang Evans".

Lucy Chang Evans
DuPage County Board
District 3

Jack T. Knuepfer Administration Building, 421 N. County Farm Road, Wheaton, Illinois 60187
(630) 407-6500 • www.dupagecounty.gov

Asian + American



Lake County Treasurer

Holly Kim
18 North County Street – #102
Waukegan, IL 60085-4335
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February 3, 2026

Anne I. Shaw, Co-Chair
2026 Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 W. Cermak Road, 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60616
E-mail: ashaw@shawattorneys.com

Dear Co-Chair Anne I. Shaw,

Thank you for your gracious invitation to attend the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration on Saturday, February 28, 2026, at the Marriott Marquis Chicago.

I am honored to be included in this important event celebrating the Lunar New Year and the profound contributions of Asian Americans to our city, our nation, and our shared history. The 2026 theme, "Asian + American," is especially meaningful as we commemorate the 250th Anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence and reflect on the enduring role of Asian immigrants in shaping the American story.

As we welcome the Year of the Horse, a symbol of strength, perseverance, and progress, this celebration serves as a powerful reminder of the energy and resilience that define both the Asian American community and our nation as a whole. Please extend my congratulations to the Chinese American Community as it hosts this signature event for the tenth time, and my appreciation to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago for organizing one of the largest and most anticipated Lunar New Year celebrations in the Midwest.

I will be pleased to provide a proclamation for inclusion in the electronic Program Book. My office will forward the requested letter and photograph in accordance with your submission guidelines.

Thank you again for the invitation and for your continued leadership in fostering unity, cultural pride, and community engagement. I wish you every success in hosting a memorable and joyous Lunar New Year celebration.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 847-377-2499.

Thank you,

Holly Kim
Lake County Treasurer

中华人民共和国驻芝加哥总领事馆

CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN CHICAGO
100 W. ERIE STREET, CHICAGO, IL 60654 TEL:(312)803-0095

Congratulatory Letter

AACC:

As we usher in the Chinese Lunar New Year of the Horse, on behalf of the Consulate General of China in Chicago, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the 43rd Annual Chinese New Year Celebration of AACC!

For a long time, AACC has been committed to uniting local Asian Americans for enriching Asian cultural values and recognizing the importance of Asian American contributions to the economic development, social progress and multiculturalism in the United States. The Chinese community has hosted this special event for ten times, making positive efforts to enhance exchanges and cooperation between the Chinese and American peoples.

This year, both China and the U.S. have major important agendas. China is starting its "15th Five-Year Plan", while the U.S. will celebrate its 250th anniversary of its founding. It is hoped AACC better connect "Asian+American" and contribute more to the increased interaction and cooperation between China and the Midwest Region of the U.S. in the future.

Wish the annual celebration a great success! Wish everyone a year of leading the way, achieving great success, and enjoying prosperity in the Year of the Horse!

Consul General Wang Baodong
Consulate-General of the People's Republic
of China in Chicago

Asian + American

駐芝加哥臺北經濟文化辦事處
TAIPEI ECONOMIC & CULTURAL OFFICE IN CHICAGO
55 West Wacker Drive, Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601
Tel: 312-616-0100 · Fax: 312-616-1486
E-mail: chi@mofa.gov.tw · Website: <https://www.roc-taiwan.org/uschi/>

January 30, 2026

Ms. Anne I. Shaw
Co-Chair, 2026 Asian American Coalition of Chicago
230 W. Cermak Road, 2nd Floor Chicago, IL 60616



Dear Ms. Shaw and the AACC Planning Committee,

On behalf of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) and the Taiwanese community in Chicago, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your kind invitation to the 43rd Annual Lunar New Year Celebration. It is a profound honor to join the entire Asian American coalition in welcoming the Year of the Horse.

The theme of this year's gala, "Asian + American," is particularly resonant as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence. It serves as a powerful reminder of the indispensable contributions that Asian immigrants—including the vibrant Taiwanese American community—have made to the cultural fabric, economic vitality, and democratic spirit of the Midwest, and the everlasting value of freedom and democracy that Taiwan and the U.S. share.

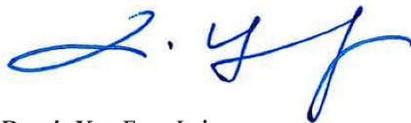
Taiwan is proud of its deep-rooted partnership with the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois and the United States. In January 2026, Taiwan and the U.S. reached a landmark trade agreement where the U.S. reduced baseline tariffs on Taiwanese goods from 20% to 15%. As part of this deal, Taiwanese tech companies committed at least US\$250 billion in direct investments to expand U.S. semiconductor, AI, and energy manufacturing. Our government also pledged an additional US\$250 billion in credit guarantees to support the growth of the Taiwanese semiconductor supply chain within the United States. Both sides also signed the "Pax Silica Declaration," focusing on AI, advanced robotics, drone supply chains, and underwater cable safety earlier this year.

Bilateral security ties are also strengthened. In late 2025, the U.S. approved its largest-ever single arms package to Taiwan, valued at US\$11 billion, including HIMARS systems and loitering munition drones. The signing of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). In response to regional challenges, Taiwan also worked with the U.S. government to announce it would increase its defense budget to 3.3% of GDP by 2026, demonstrating our resolution to depend ourselves and standing tall with our ally, the United States, on the first island chain.

We applaud the Asian American Coalition of Chicago for its dedication to unity and for hosting the largest celebration of its kind in the Midwest. We are certain that with performances by world-class talents like Shin Lim and the collective efforts of your esteemed co-chairs, this evening at the Marriott Marquis will be a historic success.

Please accept my warmest wishes for a spectacular Lunar New Year Gala. May the Year of the Horse bring prosperity, strength, and renewed energy to all members of the coalition.

Sincerely,



Dennis Yen-Feng Lei
Director General
Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Chicago

Asian + American

FEATURED PERFORMER

SHIN LIM



From Macau's glittering theaters to the bright lights of Broadway — and now, every night at the iconic Venetian Resort on the Las Vegas strip — Shin Lim is the new internationally acclaimed face of modern magic. Shin Lim is the 2015 world FISM champion for close up card magic and is the only person in the world who has won *America's Got Talent* twice.

A self-proclaimed "Sleight of Hand Artist," Lim admits that he is no sorcerer, and that he has zero intention of claiming any sort of supernatural ability.

Shin performs carefully self-choreographed routines which combine dexterity, precision, and grace. He has distilled a lifetime of training into these devious displays of dancing digits. His moves are so masterful that audiences are left wondering if what they have seen is truly possible.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN COALITION OF CHICAGO

by Sadruddin Noorani

AACC VISION

The mission of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC) is to unite all Asian Americans into a significant force for strengthening the Asian American Community in the United States, enriching Asian cultural values, and recognizing the importance of Asian American contributions to the American democracy and economy.

AACC MISSION

The AACC mission is accomplished through:

- 1) Organizing the AACC's Annual Political (nonpartisan) Forum and Gala Dinner
- 2) Conducting AACC Forums and conferences.
- 3) Hosting Annual Asian American Festival in Chicago.
- 4) Publishing Pan-Asian American public information materials; and
- 5) Providing opportunity for Asians of all ethnic groups and political parties to work together for the well-being of Asian American and all Americans.

AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION

This event is held on this grand of a scale only once a year. The Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC)'s Annual Celebration is traditionally the single largest organized annual event in Chicago's Asian American community. Every year a different Asian community takes turn playing host of the gala. This year it is the Chinese American Community, which has five times (in 1984, 1991, 1999, 2007 and 2016) held the gavel for the community's most important event of the year, as well as the Asian American Festival in 2005 and 2011. Instead of the Asian American Festival, AACC will now co-sponsor an event in May during Asian Heritage Month.

The Asian American Coalition of Chicago is the premier organization in the state of Illinois offering platforms for all the Asian American communities to showcase its culture, traditions and we are all United with diverse member communities. The AACC's Annual Gala has become a unique and phenomenal event.

Founded in 1983, the Coalition celebrates approximately 16 different cultures. Over the years, the Coalition has included representatives of the Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Thai and Vietnamese communities. Numerous dignitaries traditionally attend the festivities, including the Asian consular corps, elected and appointed governmental officials, political candidates, top business and corporate leaders, decision-makers at Chicago's major media press outlets, and everyone who considers him/herself a mover and shaker in and around, or for, the Asian American national movement.

1st AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION IN 1984

- Host: Chinese American Community - Sponsor: The Organization of Chinese Americans
- Venue: White Eagle Banquet, Niles, Illinois
- Theme: Mission of the Asian American Coalition
- Highlights: Announcement by Illinois Governor James Thompson of creation of the Asian American Advisory Council to the Governor
- Attendance: 1500

In 1984, the Coalition also sponsored a public forum for then incumbent U.S. Senator Charles Percy and challenger Congressman Paul Simon for the 1984 Senatorial Election. Over 450 Asian Americans had firsthand opportunity to hear both candidates present their views on national issues and on matters directly affecting the Asian American community

2nd AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION 1985

- Host: Korean American Community
- Sponsor: The Korean American Association of Chicago
- Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois
- Theme: Promoting Asian American civic participation

Asian + American

·Highlights: U. S. Senator Alan Dixon announced his intention to create an Asian American Advisory Committee to his office During 1985, Chicago Mayor Harold Washington created the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Asian American Affairs. U.S. Senator Paul Simon also created an Asian American Advisory Committee after he was elected.

·Attendance: 1050

3rd AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 1, 1986

Host: Filipino American Community

Sponsors: - The American Filipino Professional Civic Alliance of Illinois

Venue: Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago

Theme: "The Spirit of Asian Americans"

Highlights: An election year, an exciting and energetic program was well attended by both the Asian American Community and most of the candidates running for political office. In 1986, for the first time, Asian Americans were appointed as at-large delegates to the Democratic National Convention

Attendance: 1000

4th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, Sunday, May 3, 1987

Host: Indian American Community of Illinois

Venue: White Eagle Banquet, Niles, Illinois

Theme: Celebrating Asian American achievements

Highlights: Held in conjunction with the Asian American Heritage Week Celebration in May. The dinner celebrated achievements and contributions of Asian Americans in Illinois. Chicago Mayor Harold Washington was the chief guest. The event included programs and projects, minority business seminars, an immigration workshop, a World Trade Conference, a directory of Asian American organizations, a medical assistance program, a tourism promotion for the Asian American community, corrective anti-social programs, housing projects planning and a volunteer action program

Attendance: 1000

5th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 20, 1988

Host: Thai American Community

Sponsor: The Thai Association of Greater Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Celebrate Asian Heritage: Envision New Horizons"

Highlights: "Together, the World Can Count on Us," a contemporary unity song written especially for the Coalition, and later adopted as its theme song, debuted as opening musical number. It was performed by a cast and crew of 80 Asian American artists wearing colorful ethnic costumes

Attendance: 1200

6th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 11, 1989

Host: Vietnamese American Community

Sponsor: Nghia Sinh International, Inc.

Venue: Holidays Inn O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Asian American Contributions to America"

Highlights: Asian American Coalition was incorporated on December 2, 1988. Return performance, "Together, The World Can Count on Us," preceded by workshop on "Asian Contributions to America" and followed by issue-oriented Asian American Forum. AACC motto, "Together, we'll succeed" and AACC logo, consisting of a globe showing Asia and America straddling both sides of the Pacific, were adopted

Record Attendance: 1700

7th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION 1990

Host: Japanese American Community

Sponsor: The Chicago Japanese American Council

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Strength through Unity"

Highlights: The importance of the 1990 Census was emphasized with a workshop preceding the gala; U.S. Rep. Norman Mineta of California served as guest speaker.

Attendance: 1000

8th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION 1991

Host: Chinese American Community

Sponsors: - Chicago Chinatown Chamber of Commerce

- Chinese American Civil Council

Asian + American

- Organization of Chinese Americans

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Together, We Can"

Highlights: This celebration emphasized "Together, We Can," in many ways—from the special original opening musical drama, "Start with the Children" to the keynote address by Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien of the University of California, at Berkeley; from the community award presentation to the non-partisan, cooperative voter registration drives in various Asian American communities sponsored by the Coalition.

Attendance: 1200

9th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 22, 1992

Host: Pakistani American Community

Venue: Chicago Marriott Hotel

Theme: "Making Visions Happen"

Highlights: The prominent guests in attendance were the Chicago Mayor, Richard M. Daley, Senator Paul Simon, and Ms. Carol Mosley Braun. The emerging political presence of the Asian American community was evident in the fact that all four major media TV stations covered event, plus the major dailies. The first Pan Asian American Award was presented to Attorney Irene Cualoping, and nine community service awards were also presented in which Bangladesh was introduced for the first time. Each member community presented colorful display of their own culture. As in the past, the Asian American Coalition promoted Asian cultural and political awareness, particularly in the Chicago area. The entire detail of document along with structure and task list was presented to the host of 1993 Annual Celebration, the Korean American community.

Attendance: Over 1200

10th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 13, 1993

Host: Korean American Community

Sponsor: Korean American Association of Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "A Decade of Progress: Making Our Voices Heard"

Highlights: An exciting and energetic program celebrating the Year of the Rooster. Keynote address was given by U.S. Congressman Jay Kim of California

Attendance: Over 1000

11th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, January 29, 1994

Host: Filipino American Community

Venue: Holiday Inn O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Asian Americans Together, a New Decade of Progress"

Highlights: Keynote address was given by Maryland General Assembly Hon. David Valderrama. The First Grand Asian Award was presented to U.S Senator Paul Simon, in honor of his contributions to the Asian American Community

Attendance: 1200

12th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 11, 1995

Host: Indian American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "Strengthening the Coalition"

Highlights: To mark its twelfth anniversary, the Coalition joined forces with Polychrome Publishing to create Children of Asian America, a book of original Asian American children's stories and photographs that celebrate the unity, cooperation and commitment fostered by the Coalition. The day-long program and projects included exhibition booths on cultural, industrial, trade, and political awareness for Asian Americans. In addition, proactive career planning sessions were presented by both the IRS and the EPA officers. The Grand Asian Award was presented to A. D. Moyer, District Director U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Services, Chicago and the Pan Asian American Award was presented to Dr. Tariq Butt.

Attendance: 1000

13th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 10, 1996

Host: Thai American Community

Sponsor: The Thai Association of Greater Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Bridges for a Brighter Tomorrow"

Highlights: Keynote address was given by the Hon. H.E. Nitaya Pibulsonggram, Ambassador of Thailand, based in Washington D.C. The Grand Asian American Award was presented to Hon. George H. Ryan, Secretary of State of Illinois, Pan Asian American Award was dedicated to (late) Mr. Ping Tom, he was one of the founding members of the AACC, who passed away on 07.07.1995 at age 60. Farewell tribute was given to the Hon. Paul Simon, U.S. Senator

Asian + American

Attendance: 1300

14th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 8, 1997

Host: Vietnamese American Community. Sponsor: Nghia Sinh International, Inc.

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "Unity in Diversity"

Vision: "Asian American 2000: Education, Economy and Ethnicity"

Highlights: The Grand Asian American Award was presented to the Hon. Jim Edgar, Governor of the State of Illinois. Pan Asian American Award was presented to Dr. Panom Phoungcherdchoo, The AACC has voted that its Pan Asian American Award to be designated as "the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award." There was a day-long program with conferences on Immigration, Health Care, and Welfare Reform, workshops on Government Relations and Business Development, and forums on Community, Parents, and Interfaith Activities. The three distinguished keynote speakers were: The President of Northwestern University, Northeastern University, and the University of Chicago who shared their views on Education, Economy, and Ethnicity in the 21st Century. Proclamations from President Bill Clinton, Governor Jim Edgar, and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley were officially presented to the 1997 AACC host. The Vietnamese community handed over the AACC "Torch" to the next year's host of AACC, the Japanese community. Asian Americans from France, Canada, California, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Texas, and Washington D.C., came to attend the AACC conference and celebration.

Record Attendance: 2000

15th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 7, 1998

Host: Japanese American Community

Sponsor: The Chicago Japanese American Council

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "Creating an Asian American Mosaic"

Highlights: The event included a political forum, and entertainment was by Hiroshima. The Japanese American Community handed over the gavel to the next year's host community, the Chinese American community

Attendance: 1200

FALL 1998 AACC CANDIDATES' FORUM

Host: Chinese American Community

Sponsor: The Asian American Coalition of Chicago

Venue: Chicago Hilton and Towers

Theme: "The place to be"

Highlights: The Asian American Coalition of Chicago proudly hosted the 1998 Candidates Forum, the first of its kind on a grand scale in Chicagoland. With AACC as an umbrella organization, the bipartisan event was sponsored by 35 different community organizations. All candidates for U.S. Senate, State Constitutional Offices, and Cook County Board President were invited. A seven-member community panel addressed the candidates on various issues of importance to the Asian American community. Voter registrations also took place on site

Attendance: 500

16th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 28, 1999

Host: Chinese American Community

Sponsors: - Chicago Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, - Chinese American Civil Council, - Organization of Chinese Americans

Venue: Chicago Hilton and Towers

Theme: "Many Voices, One Vision"

Highlights: Featured performance was "Sayonara, Ms. Saigon," a musical parody on Asian American stereotypes from stage and screen, which starred the 60-member strong 1999 Asian American Coalition of Chicago artists. The highlight of the event was a presentation of an original musical power ballad written especially for the Coalition for this event, "Many Voices, One Vision," which featured music and lyrics by Keith Uchima. Pan Asian Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Rajinder Singh Mago.

Attendance: 1300

17th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 19, 2000

Host: Pakistani American Community

Venue: Navy Pier, Chicago

Theme: "Asian Americans: Reach Out and Be Counted"

Highlights: Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White announced the creation of an Asian American Advisory Council to his office and appointed an Asian American liaison. Three major media anchors and reporters emceed the gala. More emphasis was placed on cultural performances and decor, as well as on a colorful program book. All the 1800 guests and participants received handmade Pakistani rugs. More than 150 organizing community members received a "thank you" table clock with

Asian + American

AACC logo on it. Grand Asian Award was presented to Alderman Bernard L. Store of 50th Ward, Chicago and Pan Asian Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Paul Park.

Attendance: Over 1800

Since 2000 was an election year, dozens of politicians from Cook County -- U.S. congressional candidates and State constitutional officers -- spoke at the forum. More than 12 government service providing agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Bureau of Census had booth at the AACC event. Other non-profit organizations and business corporations also participated in this year's event.

The importance of the 2000 census was emphasized with a workshop preceding the gala. The political forum was followed by a gala dinner, musical and cultural programs with a segment by Actor Pat Morita. Community Service awards were given in which the Cambodian and Nepalese honorees were introduced for the first time. Among dignitaries in attendance were the Asian consular corp., elected and appointed government officials, top business and corporate leaders, and Chicago's major media outlets.

18th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, January 27, 2001

Host: The Korean American Community, The Korean American Association of Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Shining Light in the New Millennium."

Grand Asian Award was presented to Alderman Richard F. Mell, Alderman 33rd Ward, Chicago, and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Dr. Yvonne M. Lau.

Attendance: 1100

19th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 2, 2002

Host: The Filipino American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Synergy Through the Winds of Change".

Highlights: In November 2001, the Coalition also sponsored an Inter-Religious Prayer Service for World Peace and in remembrance of the victims of the 9/11 tragedy and their families. Grand Asian Award was presented to Dr. Salme Harju Steinberg and the Pan Asian Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Prem Lalvani, the AACC founders were recognized. Late Mr. Charlie Soo was recognized during Gala Dinner. The Keynote address by Ms. Helen Zia.

Attendance: 1100

20th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, March 1, 2003

Host: The Indian American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Many Voices, One Vision".

Highlights: The Grand Asian Award was presented to State Treasurer, Judy Baar Topinka.

Attendance: 1150

21st AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 28, 2004

Host: The Thai American Community. Sponsor: The Thai American Association of Illinois

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Strengthen Our Unity".

Highlights: Musical Performances: "Getting to Know You" and "America, the Beautiful" by AACC Choir. Keynote address by the Hon. H. E. Sakthip Krairiksh, Ambassador of Thailand to the United States. Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was given to Dr. Nguyen-Trung Hieu and the Grand Asian American Award given to David Wilhelm.

Attendance: 1200

22nd AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION 2005

Host: Vietnamese American Community

Sponsor: Nghia Sinh International, Inc.

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "APA Leadership Is the Key" - "Asian Americans 2005: Preparing Future Leaders"

Highlights: There was a day-long program with a variety of seminars and festivities, including a conference, an interfaith forum, a thanksgiving celebration, and a Gala dinner.

The 1st AACC "Youth Who Excels" Awards—CEO Arne Duncan of the Chicago Board of Education addressed 500 Asian American educators and presented the first ever AACC "Youth Who Excels" awards.

White House Representative—Director Joel Smith presented a Presidential Proclamation signed by President George Bush at the AACC banquet.

Asian + American

Movie Star/Film Writer-Director—Actor Tony Bui, Writer & Director of the academy award-winning film “Three Seasons” was the keynote speaker at the Gala Dinner.

Among the distinguished keynote speakers for morning, noon, afternoon, and evening sessions from Los Angeles, Chicago, Springfield, and Washington, D.C. were: Pat Quinn, Lt. Governor of Illinois and Hon. Shinae Chun, Director, U.S. Department of Labor.

Grand Asian American Award was given to Manuel J. Medina and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was given to Ms. Suchitra Surapiboonchai.

Attendance: Over 1800 (Banquet: 1500 tickets sold, conference: 500 registered participants).

23rd AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 25, 2006

Host: The Indonesian American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Unity in Diversity"

Highlights: Indonesian community hosted the AACC dinner for the first time. Among the distinguish guest were the Ambassadors of the Republic of Indonesia to the United States, the Hon. H. E. Sudjudnan Parnohadiningrat. A new contemporary Indonesian dance was specially created by Gusti Ngurah Kertayuda and the first unity rhythm dance was choreographed by Leah Tehan with community representative performers. Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award was presented to Roger C. Claar, Mayor of Bolingbrook, IL. and the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Gene Lee, Deputy Chief of Staff for the City of Chicago

Attendance: 900

24th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, March 3, 2007

Host: The Chinese American Community - Sponsors: Chicago Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, Chinese American Civic Council of Chicago, Chinese American Service League, Inc., Chinese Mutual Aid Association and the Organization of Chinese Americans, Inc., Greater Chicago Chapter

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Roar with the Boar".

Highlights: Keynote speaker was Ms. Lisa Ling, Correspondent, National Geographic Channel. A unity performance "Our Silk Road" was presented by Marc Rita, Director and Kelly Uchima, Lead Soloist. Mayor of Skokie George Van Dusen received the Grand Asian American Award and Mr. Mohinderjit Singh Saini received Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award.

25th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, January 26, 2008

Host: The Pakistani American Community

Venue: Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "The Dawn of New Asia"

Highlights: The Pakistani American Community hosted the 9th Annual Asian American Festival for the 2nd time during the Asian Heritage Month in May 21-25, 2007.

Due to election year the political forum was exciting and was well received. Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke was the keynote speaker, Chief Judge Timothy Evans of the Cook County Circuit Court received the Grand Asian American Award, and Chicago Children's Museum CEO Jim Law received the top Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award. The Malaysian American community was inducted into the AACC.

Attendance: 1300

26th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, January 24, 2009

Host: The Korean American Association of Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare

Theme: "Cultural Threads Woven into the Fabric of a United Future"

Highlights: Pre-Show Screenings "Portrait of Tiffani Kim Griffith" Excerpted from IPTV Show "eight degrees: portraits of exceptional people with impact" and "Generation: Undefined!" and "Top Ten Ways: How to Tell If You're An Asian" Cultural Showcase: "Hanryu" by Soul ReVive. Grand Asian Award to the Hon. Pat Quinn, Lt. Governor. The Korean American Community handed over the AACC "Torch" to next year's host: The Filipino American Community for 2010.

Attendance: 1200

27th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, January 23, 2010

Host: The Filipino American Community of Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL

Theme: Bridging Generations and Cultures for Progress

Asian + American

Highlights: Journalist Euna Lee of Current TV was the keynote speaker. A political Forum, Cocktail Reception, Opening Ceremonies followed by the dinner, entertainment and awards ceremonies. "The Grand Asian Award" was renamed as: "The Grand Asian Sandra Otaka Memorial Award." and it was presented to Attorney Richard A. "Dick" Devine, and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Tammy Duckworth.

Attendance: Over 1100

28th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 26, 2011

Host: The Indian American Community of Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "ONE VISION MANY VOICES"

Highlights: Keynote speaker, Iowa State Senator Ms. Swati Dandekar. Grand Asian Sandra Otaka Memorial Award presented to State of Illinois Treasurer Dan Rutherford, and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award presented to Attorney Steve Kim.

Attendance: 900

29th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 25, 2012

Host: The Thai American Association of Illinois

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "IT'S TIME...."

The Thai American Community has thrice before (1988, 1996 and 2004) held the gavel for the Asian American community's most important event of the year.

Keynote Speaker: His Excellency, Professor Kantathi Suphamongkhon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand (2005-2006). Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award presented to IL Secretary of State Jesse White, and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Mr. Raymond B. Lee.

Attendance: 1200

30th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 23, 2013

Host: Vietnamese American Community - Sponsor: Nghia Sinh International, Inc.

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois

Theme: "Celebrating Three Decades of Unified Leadership & Services"

Highlights: There was a day-long program with a variety of seminars and festivities, including a conference on education and economy, an interfaith forum on global peace, Asian American Business and Cultural Exhibits, Community and Family Health Fair, a gala dinner.

Attendance: The following community services were successfully carried out with the participation of more than 2700

Attendance: 2,720 for all-day events and gala dinner.

31st AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 22, 2014

Host: Japanese American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "Beyond the Bamboo Ceiling"

Highlights: The event included a political forum, presenting community service awards and entertainments.

The Sandra Otaka Grand Asian American Award received by Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky

The Japanese American Community handed over the AACC "Torch" to 2015 host, the Indonesian American community.

Attendance: 1300

32nd AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 28, 2015

Host: Indonesian American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont

Theme: "E Pluribus Unum * Bhinneka Tunggal Ika".

Highlights: There was a day-long program with a variety of Seminars, Conference on Business Forum and Networking, Community and Family Health Fair, Youth Education Network Forum, Immigration Law seminar, Cooking Demo and a Gala Dinner. The Keynote speaker was IL Secretary of State Jesse White during the day program and the Keynote speaker during the Gala was U.S. Rep. IL 8th Dist. Tammy Duckworth. The Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award was presented to Lisa Madigan, IL Attorney General, and the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Awards was presented to Attorney Aurora Austriaco.

Attendance: 1,700 all-day events and Gala Dinner.

33rd AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 6, 2016

Host: Chinese American Community

Location: Hyatt Regency Chicago on Wacker Drive, Chicago

Asian + American

Theme: "ENVISION, ENLIGHTEN, EMPOWER".

Highlights: A spectacular and never seen before Eight Lions dancing to thundering drums and cymbals before a packed stage of Federal, State and local dignitaries ushered in the beginning of the fifth round of host community rotations, a proud Asian American tradition started more than three decades ago. Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award was presented to U. S. Senator Richard J. Durbin, and the Pan Asian Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Ms. Tuyet Le, Executive Director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice of Chicago. After cultural performances and award ceremonies, many guests stayed till midnight for the equally lavish after-party.

Attendance: 1300

34th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, March 11, 2017

Host: The Pakistani American Community

Venue: Hilton Chicago, 720 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago IL.

Theme: "One World, Our World"

Highlights: At a time when the nation was divided more than ever, the Asian American Coalition of Chicago was rounding up its 16 Asian American communities and beyond to celebrate the Annual AACC Gala. The Pakistani community showcased its most vibrant and colorful cultural performances on stage with decor of the venue.

The Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award was presented to Cook County Clerk David Orr, and the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Ms. Carmen Estacio.

Attendance at the Gala: 1,500+

Also, the Pakistani American community hosted the Asian American Festival at the Daley Plaza during the Asian American Heritage Month from Monday, May 22nd to Friday, May 26, 2017.

Festival Attendance: 5,000+

35th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 24, 2018

Host: The Korean American Association of Chicago

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL

Theme: "Be United, Stay Together"

Due to election year, many elected government officials and those who are seeking office were present at this event and participated in pre-gala Political Forum.

The Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award was presented to Justice Anne M. Burke, and the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Bart Moy.

Attendance 1200+

36th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION, February 23, 2019

Host: The Filipino American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL

Theme: "One World, One Vision"

Due to municipal election year, many elected government officials and those who are seeking office were present at this event and participated in pre-gala Political Forum. Keynote Speaker: Jan Schakowsky, U.S. Rep 9th Congressional Dist. IL.

The Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award was presented to ABC-7 News, Chicago, and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award was presented to Attorney Tina Tchen.

Attendance 1,200+

37th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION February 8, 2020

Host: The Indian American Community & co-hosted by the Punjabi Cultural Society of Chicago.

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL

Theme: "Advocate. Advance. Achieve."

Due to election year in all levels (local, federal to Presidential), many elected government officials and those who are seeking office were present at this event and participated in pre-gala Political Forum.

Attorney Dennis Mondero received the Pan Asian Ping Tom Memorial Award and IL State Rep Michelle Mussman was received the Grand Asian Sandra Otaka Memorial Award. Chicago Council of Global Affairs Senior fellow Ms. Cecile Shea was the Keynote.

The Indian American Community handed over the AACC "Torch" to next year's host: The Thai American Community for the Year 2021.

Attendance 1,000+

Asian + American

38th AACC ANNUAL CELEBRATION – February 20, 2021

Host: The Thai American Community

Venue: Wat Dhammaram (Buddhist Temple) in Chicago and live (virtual) on YouTube <https://youtu.be/BwP7zmKcCFE>. This premier event was streamed around the globe on AACC's website at www.aacchicago.org on Saturday, February 20, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. It was seen by over 12,000 viewers across the U.S. and Asia.

Theme: "Unity is Power" was selected to showcase the diverse accomplishments of Asian Americans across Chicagoland.

Attendance: 200 (due to Covid-19, in person attendance was kept limited to AACC BODs, host committee, and performers).

Attorney and book publisher Sandra S. Yamate (Japanese American) was named recipient as the 2021 Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award, and the Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC) was named as the 2021 recipient of the Coalition's Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award.

39th ANNUAL CELEBRATION - March 12, 2022

Host: The Malaysian American Community

Venue: Drury Lane Theater, Oakbrook Terrace

Theme: "ROAR: Respect-Optimism-Amity-Representation"

Day: Saturday, March 12, 2022, at 5.30 pm

Highlights: For the first time, the Malaysian American community hosted the AACC Gala. The Malay wedding costume was worn by the Kompang performers (hand drum percussion).

Chicago Police Detective Mr. Henry Lai, President Asian American Law Enforcement Association was the recipient of the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award, and Ms. Laura Murphy, IL. State Senator was named as the recipient of the Coalition's Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award.

Attendance: 800

The Malaysian American community hosted AACC's annual Asian Heritage Month Festival on Saturday, May 14, 2022, at Chinatown Square, Chicago from 11:0 am to 3:00 pm. All day health fair and cultural performances.

40th ANNUAL CELEBRATION and Forum February 18, 2023

Host: The Vietnamese American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL.

Theme: "Celebrating Four Decades Of United Leadership And Service"

Highlights: For the fifth time, the Vietnamese American Community hosted the AACC Celebration. The event featured a half-day Business and Education Forums, which ran on separate tracks, with the goal of highlighting government services available to AAPI communities and sharing resources. An afternoon interfaith prayer session followed. At the evening Gala dinner, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker presented the Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Pan Asian American Award to Grace B. Hou, Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services. Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs presented the Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award to NBC 5 Chicago. Krystal Ka'ai, Executive Director for the White House Initiative on AANHPIs, read the official greeting from President Joe Biden. Daphne Kwok, AARP's Vice President for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, delivered the keynote address.

Attendance at daytime activities: 550 and at the Gala: 1000

41st ANNUAL CELEBRATION – February 10, 2024

Host: The Japanese American Community

Venue: Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace, IL.

Theme: "Together for a Brighter Tomorrow"

MCs: Joanie Lum, Fox 32 Chicago, and Eric Horng, ABC-7 Eyewitness News

Recipient, Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Pan Asian American Award: Michael Chin, Senior Vice President, Commercial Banking, Byline Bank

Recipient, Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award: Justice Joy Cunningham, Illinois Supreme Court

Video and in-person messages from: US Senators Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin, US Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, and other Illinois constitutional officers

Program performance highlights: Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai, AACC Children's Virtual Choir, Chicago Koto Group, Mikoren Awa Odori, Indonesian Dance of Illinois

Attendance: 900

42nd ANNUAL AACC CELEBRATION – February 22, 2025

Host: The Indonesian American Community

Venue: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL.

Theme: " *** ONE *** "

Asian + American

The largest extravagant Asian American celebration ever with grand opening ceremony by Malang Flower Carnival and OndelOndel Parade highlighting mesmerizing celebrity presenters, artists, actors, singers, also featuring: Couture Fashion Show, Javanese Gamelan, All-Star ensemble, "Rhythm of One" Unity Dance, Business Expo, and packed with Federal, State, and Local dignitaries.

Ms. Linda Yu, Trailblazing Anchor and legendary TV Broadcaster named recipient of the 2025 Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award, Illinois State Treasurer Michael W. Frerichs was named as the 2025 of the Grand Asian American Award Sandra Otaka Memorial Award.

Attendance: 1500+

43rd ANNUAL AACC CELEBRATION – February 28, 2026

Host: The Chinese American Community

Venue: Marriott Marquis Chicago, IL.

Theme: "Asian + American" based on their campaign to encourage Asian Americans to celebrate the complexity and beauty of their dual identities.

Highlights: For the sixth time, the Chinese American Community hosted the AACC Celebration.

The Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award recipient was the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award recipient was Dr. Manjeet Singh Chawla.

The Chinese American Community handed over the AACC "Torch" to next year's host: The Pakistani American Community for the year 2027.



**The 43rd ANNUAL LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION
HOSTED BY THE CHINESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

HOST COMMITTEE 2026



Dr. Karen Eng



Grace Chan McKibben



Anne Shaw

2026 Celebration Gala Co-Chairs

Asian + American

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2025 – 2026

CHINESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Dr. Karen Eng



Anne Shaw - President

FILIPINO AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Aurora Austriaco



Lourdes Mon

INDIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Judge Aileen Bandari



Raj Mago - Secretary

INDONESIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Martino Tangkar

Asian + American

JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Megan Nakano



Karen Kanemoto

KOREAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Paul Park



Kay Kihwa Rho – Treasurer

MALAYSIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Dr. Kim K. Tee



Catherine Wang

Asian + American

PAKISTANI AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Sadruddin Noorani



Rehan Zaid

THAI AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Knight Chungamsri



Nancy Suvarnamani

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Khan Buu Tran



Lan Dinh

Asian + American

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING COMMITTEE 2026

CHINESE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Chinatown Parking Corporation

Darryl Tom

Chinese-American Museum of Chicago

Caroline Ng

Chinese American Service League

Paul Luu

Puitak Center

David Wu

**Coalition for a Better Chinese American
Community**

Grace Chan-McKibben

Midwest Asian Health Association

Hong Liu

Chinese Mutual Aid Association

Rhea Yap

SHOW PRODUCER

Astrocasters

ONSITE EVENT COORDINATOR

Jan-le Low

STAGE & PROGRAM

Jennifer Chui – Chair

AWARD SUBMISSION

Sadrudin Noorani - Chair

TICKETS & REGISTRATION

Darryl Tom – Chair, Anne Shaw

PROGRAM BOOK

Darryl Tom - Chair

VIP RECEPTION

Anne Shaw- Chair

WEBSITE

Rob Austin – Worksite LLC

MEDIA & OUTREACH

H3M Media, LLC

Coalition for a Better Chinese American
Community

Asian + American

VOLUNTEERS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Rich Frachey – Volunteer Co-Lead | Steve Lau |
| Annie Lau – Volunteer Co-Lead | Jan-le Low |
| Soo Lon Moy – Registration Lead | Sara Liang |
| Ed Lai – Greeter Lead | Satnam Mago |
| Peggy Gordon – Coat Check Co-Lead | Bernice Mai |
| Angelo Eng – Coat Check Co-Lead | Tom McKibben |
| Ada Tong – Political Forum Lead | Matt McWhinney |
| Ven Sherrod – Photographer | Angela Ng |
| Howard Yu – Photographer | Stanley Peng |
| Fengjiao Yao – Photographer | Kiana Pouyat |
| Syed Khallil – Photographer | Zeal Rathod |
| Sadaf Ahmad-Johnson | Leanna Ruan |
| Eileen Chen | Henior Ruan |
| Nelson Chen | Iang Sharping |
| Emily Chou | Barbara Shaw |
| Janice Dantes | Caryn Shaw |
| Ankii Dong | Ven Sherrod |
| Michelle Du | Viable Shum |
| Quininig Fang | Junhao Situ |
| Sean Gai | Jimmy Ton |
| Abigail Huang | Maggie Tse |
| Hiu Kao | Derek Uehara |
| Ian Lam | Wenyan Wang |

PRODUCER / SHOW DIRECTOR

PRODUCTION

Jennifer Chui, Stage Director / Decorations



Jennifer Chui serves as director for this year's Lunar New Year Gala. As a 2007 AAC Youth Awardee, she welcomed the opportunity to give back to the organization and Chinese community. In her professional capacity, Jennifer manages an information security risk management team at financial services institution.

Asian + American



Jan-le Low, Honorary Event Maestro

Jan-le Low is the founder of Golden Catalyst and a seasoned entrepreneur with extensive experience across event production, nonprofit leadership, and the restaurant and hospitality industries. She is the executive producer of *CNY in the Desert™*, recognized by *Forbes* as one of the “Top 8 Places in the U.S. to Celebrate Chinese New Year,” and a recipient of multiple honors, including the President’s Volunteer Service Award and Las Vegas Citizen of the Month.

A dedicated champion for small businesses and entrepreneurs, Jan-le serves as Senior Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Development at National ACE, driving economic growth through education, advocacy, and capacity-building programs. She also serves on the executive board of the Women’s Chamber of Commerce of Nevada and is a co-founder of the Nevada Small Business Council.

Inspired by the visionary leadership of Dr. Karen Eng and driven by her own passion for the Asian Pacific American community, Jan-le is honored to share her expertise at the 43rd Annual AACC Lunar New Year Celebration, helping make it an epic evening to remember!

ENTERTAINMENT

LION DANCERS

The Lion Dances are performed by the Chicago Guangzhou Association Lion Dance Team and the Formosa Association of Student Cultural Ambassadors, who are also performing a SanTaiZi or Techno/Electric Prince performance.

CELEBRITY PRESENTERS



Nancy Loo - Emcee

Nancy Loo is NewsNation’s West Coast Bureau Correspondent.

Nancy Loo is a Los Angeles-based National Correspondent for News Nation. She brings an extensive background of international reporting, having worked as a reporter and anchor in Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York City, and Chicago.

During her tenure at the network, Loo has reported on major stories, including the 2025 Los Angeles area wildfires, the multi-day anti-ICE protests in Los Angeles, and the 2024 presidential election, among others.

Throughout her career, Loo has traveled to England, China, Japan, Taiwan, North and South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines for news assignments. Before moving to Chicago in 2001, Ms. Loo was an anchor/reporter for WABC-TV in New York, where she earned three Emmy Award nominations.

Asian + American

Born in Hong Kong and raised in Northern California, she earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Oregon. She speaks Cantonese and has studied German, Japanese, and American Sign Language. She previously served as Co-President of the Asian American Journalists Association and remains active in AAJA and other organizations close to her core.



Brian Cheung - Emcee

Brian Cheung is a New York-based business and data correspondent for NBC News, covering all things related to the economy and finance across NBC's broadcasts (TODAY Show, NBC Nightly News, MSNBC) and digital platforms (NBCNews.com, NBC News Now).

Brian began his career as an analyst at the Federal Reserve, jumped to journalism as a beat reporter in DC, and then made his way into broadcast at Yahoo Finance as a reporter and anchor.

Brian is a graduate of Syracuse University, with a master's degree in applied economics from Johns Hopkins University. He is also an alumnus of the Emma Bowen Foundation.

MUSICIANS



Xiao Chen

Xiao Chen is a seasoned emcee, performer, and community leader. Beginning his stage career at the age of four, he has competed and placed in numerous international singing competitions. Over the years, he has actively performed across Chinese-American communities in the United States. His work includes guest performances at Hong Kong pop star concerts, frequent appearances as the designated national anthem singer, and hosting major events such as the Chicago Chinese New Year Gala and Miss Chicago Chinatown.

In addition to his stage career, Xiao has judged competitions including The Voice of China (Chicago division), where he promotes and mentors emerging talent. Professionally, he is a Certified Financial Planner (CFP®) and a partner at Dentdelioun Financial. He also serves as President of the Hunan Association of the Midwest USA and Vice President of the Chinese American Association of Greater Chicago (CAAGC), advancing cultural exchange and community development.

Asian + American



Jennifer Zhang

Recently named to the "Top 100 Most Influential Chinese" (2023 & 2024) by Forbes Magazine, Jennifer is celebrated for bridging Eastern traditional heritage with Western modern luxury. A rare talent proficient in over ten traditional Chinese instruments—most notably Dizi and Xiao—Jennifer has received more than 50 prestigious gold awards, including Best Asian Entertainer at the Chicago Music Awards, Best Artist at the Chinese Songwriter Contest in the US, and Best Music Video Award at the US-China Film Festival.

Jennifer is also the winner of five coveted international titles, including Miss Friendship Ambassador of Chicago, Miss China International, and Brilliant Miss World. Her performances have graced over 800 international stages, including the Bloomberg Global Business Forum, where she has performed for world leaders and luminaries such as President Barack Obama, Vice President JD Vance, Bill Gates, Jensen Huang, Jack Ma, and Anna Wintour.

An honors graduate of Northwestern University and Founder of NU Club of China (the official alumni club for her proud alma mater), she continues to redefine the role of the modern cultural ambassador on the world stage.

Asian + American

2026 ASIAN AMERICAN COALITION OF CHICAGO AWARDS

Every year a different Asian community takes turn playing host of this Lunar New Year celebration which is the largest event of the Asian American Community in the Greater Chicago area. This year the Chinese American community once again takes the helm which marks the beginning of the fifth round of hosting rotations which began all the way back to 1983. The theme of this year's gala celebration is **"Asian + American."**

According to the 2020 Census, the Asian Pacific American population in Illinois numbers approximately 871,250 or 6.8%—up from 590,209 or 4.6%—in 2010, of the statewide population. Numerous dignitaries traditionally attend the festivities, including the Asian consular corps, elected and appointed governmental officials, political candidates, top business and corporate leaders, decision-makers and movers and shakers in and around or for, the Asian American engagement and empowerment movement.

Traditionally at the gala event, the Coalition will recognize two outstanding individuals, one of Asian descent and one of non-Asian descent, who have made exceptional contribution to the Asian American community. This year, AACC's most prestigious Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award will go to Manjeet Singh Chawla, a board-certified hematologist and oncologist and community leader in the Thai community. The equally important recognition, the Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award will go to the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, which has organized immigrant communities in Illinois for 30 years.

The Coalition also announces the awardees of the 2026 Exemplary Community Service Awards and the Youth Who Excels Awards as follows:

2026 PAN ASIAN AMERICAN PING TOM MEMORIAL AWARD



Dr. Manjeet Singh Chawla

Dr. Manjeet Singh Chawla, born in India and raised in Chiang Mai, Thailand, has built a distinguished medical career defined by his unwavering dedication to patient care and community service. After earning his medical degree and completing his residency at Chiang Mai University, he completed a fellowship at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and achieved board certification in Hematology and Oncology. He currently serves as Director of Medical Oncology. Dr. Chawla's excellence in the field was further solidified when he was named one of America's Most Honored Professionals in 2019, a prestigious recognition celebrating the top tier of American professionals.

Throughout his career, Dr. Chawla has provided medical care to underserved populations. He also facilitated donations from Thorek Hospital of flu vaccines, laboratory kits, and medical

Asian + American

supplies to Chicagoland communities. In addition, Dr. Chawla collaborated with Maria Pappas and Peter Kamberos, President of the Thorek Memorial Foundation, to help establish a foundation supporting Chiang Mai University professors who conducted joint research with the University of Illinois. He has contributed critical medical equipment, oxygen tanks, and isolation units to Chiang Mai University. Locally, Dr. Chawla addressed health disparities by opening a Saturday clinic for low-income patients. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he expanded these hours to most evenings to provide essential wellness checks and continues to utilize his network to ensure patients receive necessary assistance.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Dr. Chawla served as a pillar of the community. With the assistance of Thorek Hospital, he coordinated the “Fit to Fly” program with the Royal Thai Consulate in Chicago to provide medical certificates, facilitate free vaccines, and host educational webinars. His profound commitment has been recognized with a Royal Decoration from His Majesty the King of Thailand and the highest honors from the Thai American Association of Illinois. Beyond healthcare, his support for cultural and religious initiatives, including the construction of a Thai pavilion at a local Buddhist temple, reflects a lifetime of service dedicated to the well-being and heritage of the Pan-Asian American community.

2026 GRAND ASIAN AMERICAN SANDRA OTAKA MEMORIAL AWARD



ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE RIGHTS

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Since 1996, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) has been dedicated to organizing immigrant communities, winning pro-immigrant policies at all levels of government, and forming alliances across communities to build power so that all people have the opportunity to thrive.

Over the years, the coalition has worked to strengthen and protect the Chicago Welcome City Ordinance, passed the Illinois Trust Act, and gained millions of dollars in immigrant services funding, including interpretation and translation services, citizenship application assistance, and public benefits assistance. This funding has supported services to immigrants at more than a dozen Asian American social service organizations. Since January 2025, ICIRR has been leading the effort to share critical Know-Your-Rights information and offer assistance through its Family Support Network hotline. Through ICIRR’s technical support and policy leadership, Asian American immigration support services have been able to protect our communities during these uncertain times.

2026 EXEMPLARY COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDEES



Jane Lau

Retired Community Outreach representative for the Chicago Board of Elections – Chinese American community awardee

Jane Lau served for 22 years as the Community Outreach Representative of the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners to the Chinese American Community since Chinese language assistance became a Federal mandate under the Section 203 of the US Voting Rights Act. Her effective management of Chinese language translation of the ballots and all election-related communications, staffing of bilingual election judges at all polling places in precincts with significant Chinese speaking population, as well as ongoing community education programs in partnership with multiple community organizations, had played a significant role in initiatives leading to many social, economic and political advancements in the community of the past two decades. She also extended her experience and knowledge to assist other Asian American communities as more Asian languages required attention due to new Federal mandate or significant increase in population.

When Jane retired in October 2025, her devoted and impactful service had left a legacy of a much engaged and informed Asian American electorate and generated accolades from the Chicago Board of Elections, the Chicago City Council, and across the social and organizational landscape of the Chinese and Asian American communities.



Jaime Dejuris

Principal, Dejuris Management Group, Inc. – Filipino American community awardee

Jaime P. Dejuris is the Principal of the Dejuris Management Group, Inc., which is a private, family-owned corporation engaged in the ownership, operation, and management of multi-unit Dunkin' and Baskin-Robbins restaurants since 1990, as well as management and leasing of residential and commercial properties. Currently, the company owns ten Dunkin' and six Baskin-Robbins in the northwest side of the city and in the Illinois Medical District. He is also a partner in Midwest Food Manufacturing, the second biggest donut production facility in the Dunkin' systems serving over 200 Dunkin' restaurants. He is the former Chief Financial Officer of California Donuts King, LLC., a Dunkin' franchisee in Northern California, with six operating Dunkin' shops. His other interests include minority shares in 2nd Gen Investment Group, an owner, manager and operator of another twelve Dunkin' shops in Illinois.

Asian + American

Jaime had been the recipient of President's Award for Multi-Unit Retail Excellence in years 1999, 2000 and 2002. He was also awarded the Founder's Award for Superior Leadership for three consecutive years in 2003-2005. He was awarded the "Buhayani" award by his hometown of Calamba, Laguna for his contribution to the city and its citizens for best emulating the works and ideals of Dr. Jose P. Rizal. Most recently, Jaime was appointed to represent the Dunkin' Brands to serve in the Small Business Task Force of the Illinois Retail Merchants Association. In April 2009, he was awarded the Outstanding Filipino American Businessman award by the PACCGC. He has served in various positions in the Dunkin' Brands franchisee leadership including the Co-chair of the District Advisory Council and Vice-chair of the Market Leadership Council. He served for several years as Board of Directors of the Dunkin' Donuts Midwest Independent Franchisee Organization. Locally, he was a founding member of the Friends of the Humboldt Park Library and a strong supporter of the Block Club Federation. He is a member of several chamber of commerce associations including the Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Chicago.

Jaime graduated with a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Santo Tomas. He was a Certified Public Accountant in the Philippines and in the State of Illinois.



Apinder (Vic) Singh

Certified Illinois Assessing Officer and Board of Review Member for Lake County – Indian American community awardee

Vic Singh is a Certified Illinois Assessing Officer (CIAO) and serves as one of the three Permanent Board of Review Members for the Lake County Board. Since 2011, he has worked with the Lake County Chief Assessment Office as a Board of Review member. In this role, Vic's primary responsibilities include property valuation, adjusting property assessments, granting qualified exemptions, and conducting hearings for all parcels within Lake

County.

Vic has actively contributed to the community in multiple capacities, notably serving for many years as both an election judge and ballot judge in Lake County. His commitment to civic engagement is further demonstrated by his long-standing involvement in the Asian American Coalition of Chicago, where he has participated and supported events as an Indian American for decades.

Vic Singh is passionate about philanthropy and community service, supporting numerous non-profit organizations. He served as president of the Punjabi Cultural Society of Chicago in 2015 and continues to serve on its board of governors. Additionally, Vic donates his time to various Realtor committees, including Professional Standards, Grievance, and Government Affairs. His charitable contributions extend to a wide array of causes, such as Lurie Children's Hospital, Easter Seals, Helping Our Heroes, Oneness, and Life Source, among others.

Asian + American

Vic Singh's real estate career is marked by over three decades of success and recognition. He spent seven years with Century 21, consistently achieving multi-million-dollar producer status and earning numerous sales awards. His tenure of more than 25 years with RE/MAX brought further honors, including membership in the RE/MAX 100% Club and induction into the RE/MAX Hall of Fame. Vic also holds the prestigious Certified Residential Specialist (CRS) designation, an elite credential attained by only about 3% of realtors nationwide, requiring advanced education, extensive experience, and a proven record of success.

In addition to holding Real Estate Salesperson and Broker Licenses since 1987, Vic Singh is a Certified Residential Specialist (CRS), CCIM, and held a Real Estate Appraiser License from 1990 to 1994. His academic achievements include a Diploma in Electrical Engineering from the Government Polytechnical Institute in India.



Budi Kusnoto

Founder, AllCare Orthodontic Center – Indonesian American community awardee

Dr. Budi Kusnoto is a respected orthodontist, educator, and community leader who has dedicated nearly three decades to serving Chicago's diverse populations. Since arriving from Indonesia in 1995, he has championed oral healthcare access and education across the Chinatown, Bridgeport, Little Village, and South and West Loop communities.

As founder of AllCare Orthodontic Center and Program Director at the University of Illinois Chicago Department of Orthodontics, Dr. Kusnoto leads outreach initiatives providing free and low-cost dental and orthodontic care to underserved families. He also organizes volunteer programs such as the Tzu Chi Foundation Chinatown Summer Camp, fostering youth mentorship and health awareness. In addition, he has been contributed to the Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC)'s 42nd Annual Lunar New Year 4723 / 2025 Celebration Extravaganza, and also AACC's 32nd Conference on Business and Networking and Annual Lunar New Year Celebration, and actively supports Indonesian Diaspora Network - Midwest, USA. In 2024, he was honored as a Distinguished Community Leader during the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month by Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas.

Together with his wife and two children, Dr. Kusnoto continues to serve the Asian Pacific and broader Chicago communities as an active parishioner of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Chinatown-Bridgeport, exemplifying faith-driven compassion and service.

Asian + American



Reverend Patti Nakai

Former Minister, Buddhist Temple of Chicago – Japanese American community awardee.

Reverend Patti Nakai has served as a minister at the Buddhist Temple of Chicago from 1995 to 2013 as Associate Minister and from 2013 to 2023 as Resident Minister. She continues to serve in retirement. She has ministered to the Japanese and non-Japanese communities and pioneered the studying of modern thinkers in Shin Buddhism nationwide and abroad. She led the Chicago Japanese Buddhist Federation from 2013 to present. Reverend Patti served as the Secretary of the Chicago Japanese American Council from 2016 to present and provided wisdom and guidance in projects that brought together the Japanese National and Japanese American communities helping develop Japan Festival Chicago. She represented the JA community in vigils through the years, volunteers as a court watcher with Chicago Appleseed, and teaches a Buddhism class to inmates in the state penal system. She has been active in the Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue since 2015 and was selected to present before Pope Francis in Rome. She is active in internment camp pilgrimages and as an assisting minister for the Ireicho, Book of Names tour. Her dedication to transmitting the Buddhist Teachings has brought about greater understandings between ethnic communities, bringing out the humanity and compassion that we all seek.



Sung W. Kim

Retired Surgeon, Loyola Medical Center - Korean American community awardee

Sung W. Kim started his surgical practice as a specialist in general surgery at Loyola Medical Center Gottlieb Memorial Hospital in August 1978 and worked as a Medical Doctor for 38 years, performing more than 10,000 surgeries with a spirit of sacrifice and service. He participated in numerous medical mission trips, providing care for underserved patients. After retiring in 2016, he became founding president of the Chicago Korean Rotary Club and currently serves as Vice Chair of the Korean American Association of Chicago Board.



Wanis S. Shurts

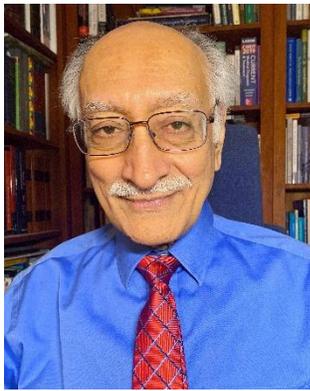
Past President of the Malaysian Association of Illinois – Malaysian American community awardee.

Wanis S. Shurts, a devoted Malaysian-born leader, has passionately championed her culture since immigrating to the United States in 2015. Her mission is to share the vibrant tapestry of Malaysian heritage through food, friendship, and compelling storytelling within her community. She served

Asian + American

as the President of the Malaysian Association of Illinois (2021–2023) and remains an active member and strong supporter of the Malaysian Club of Chicago. Wanis frequently shines as a home chef and popular vendor at Taste of Malaysia events, actively connecting Malaysians abroad and keeping traditions alive—one flavorful dish at a time.

Wanis is also a seasoned Freelance Senior Copywriter & Brand Strategist with over 27 years in advertising and creative work, 15 as a top-tier freelancer. She helps brands thrive by listening, strategizing, and delivering results that stand out. Her diverse experience includes leading communications for a public-listed company in Malaysia, giving her unique insight into cost-effective, performance-driven strategies. Her dedication to research and impactful storytelling is exemplified by one of her most notable projects: researching and writing a 200-year corporate history book for SD Guthrie, a global leader in sustainable palm oil.



Dr. Teepu Siddique

Neurologist and Geneticist – Pakistani American community awardee

Teepu Siddique MD, DSc (hc), DLitt (hc), FAAN is a neurologist and geneticist born and educated in Pakistan, with advanced training in neurology, neuromuscular medicine and neurogenetics from the US. His pioneering work in genetics of neurodegenerative diseases identified the first ALS- (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Lou Gehrig disease) causing gene (SOD1), after which his group constructed the first genetic animal model for any neurodegenerative condition. Since then, he has identified additional disease-causing genes for ALS, Parkinson disease and related disorders. He recently demonstrated that alteration in protein degradation pathways of the ubiquitin-proteasome and autophagosome-lysosome systems is a common pathology in all types of ALS, paving the way for targeted, effective treatments of ALS.

His 300+ original papers have received 50,529 citations with a h-index of 90 For 32 years Dr. Siddique was Professor of Neurology, Cell and Molecular Biology and Pathology at Northwestern University, where he maintained both his research lab and an esteemed clinical practice. He established NU's Division of Neuromuscular Medicine, developing the largest ALS clinic in the Chicago area, as well as a clinical fellowship in Neuromuscular Medicine. In the lab, he mentored many students and fellows, developing the first and largest structured summer program at NU for minority students. His mentees have themselves established specialty practices and research labs throughout the world, from Australia to Scotland, Pakistan to Japan, Los Angeles to Little Rock, and in between.

Asian + American



James Limson

Former president of the Thai American Association of Illinois –Thai American community awardee

James Limson’s impact on the community has been profound and sustained over many years. A pivotal early achievement was his donation of office space from 2002–2006 to launch the Thai Community Center, a vital resource offering free medical, legal, and personal consultations. This initiative represented a total contribution of over \$60,000 in funding and donated space. Mr. Limson further demonstrated his civic leadership by hosting the 2007 Royal Thai Krathina Festival, personally contributing a significant portion of the \$80,000 raised for the temple. He went on to serve as the esteemed President of the Thai American Association of Illinois from 2014–2016. Beyond his community leadership, his passion for education shines through his “Plastic Bags the Conqueror” children’s book project; he personally funded the publication and free distribution of 10,000 copies to schools in rural Thailand. He also opened a day care to serve underprivileged children in Chicagoland areas (Rainbow Day Care) from 1996 – to present. From major philanthropic endeavors to grassroots support, James Limson’s extensive contributions have left an indelible mark on the community he serves.



Thomas Thanh Ngo

President, Millennia Professional Services – Vietnamese American community awardee

Thomas Ngo’s journey highlights resilience and purpose. Arriving in the United States at age 13 as a Vietnamese refugee with no family, no English skills, and no financial resources, he faced immense challenges to build a future rooted in education and hard work. From living in Section 8 housing and relying on food banks, Thomas earned a Civil Engineering degree from the University of Illinois while working part-time jobs to fund his studies.

In 2004, after years of professional experience and facing barriers of bias and limited access to networks, Thomas co-founded Millennia Professional Services with a vision of inclusion and integrity. Starting with personal savings and credit cards, he worked without pay for two years to keep the dream alive. Today, Millennia employs over 100 professionals across three Illinois offices, delivering civil, transportation, and survey services with excellence.

Beyond business, Thomas actively supports youth programs and the Vietnamese community, participating in events such as Memorial Day Parades and contributing to Vietnamese associations and churches. He mentors future engineers and sponsors initiatives that empower underserved groups. His story reflects the power of perseverance and the belief that opportunity should never be limited by background.

2026 YOUTH WHO EXCELS AWARDEES



Eric Chen

Princeton University – Chinese American community awardee

Eric Chen is an exceptional youth who has demonstrated a large and heartfelt commitment to his community. While a student at Chicago's Walter Payton High School, Eric founded his school's first Cantonese Language & Culture Club to bring awareness to the vibrant culture that he calls his own. He has gone on to study at Princeton University but not before making a significant impact on his community back home. Involved in a variety of extracurriculars, Eric frequently volunteered with Midwest Asian Health Association, Chinese American Service League, and Pui Tak Center. Eric was an active member of Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community's (CBCAC's) Origin Youth Program and Teen Coalition for Chinatown (TCC), a recently formed program for high school students interested in urban planning. He constantly used these opportunities to encourage community members to be civically engaged and use their voices on topics like gentrification and language access.



Lauren Mendiola

York Community High School – Filipino American community awardee

Lauren Mendiola is currently enrolled in a Medical Internship program through York Community High School, where she gains hands-on exposure to healthcare careers and develops a strong foundation in professionalism and responsibility. She has earned the Seal of Biliteracy, demonstrating proficiency in two languages and the ability to communicate effectively with diverse communities. Alongside these achievements, she maintains a 4.0 GPA while challenging herself with several AP courses, reflecting her dedication to academic excellence and time management. Beyond academics, she devotes weekends to volunteering at Feed My Starving Children, where she contributes to meaningful service efforts that address global hunger. Outside of school, she works at a boutique called La Jolie, assisting customers and helping cultivate a positive, relationship-focused shopping experience. Through these experiences, she has strengthened her communication skills, gained confidence, and developed leadership, dedication, and commitment, qualities she consistently strives to apply in all aspects of her life.

Asian + American



Ava Kaur Silverstein

York High School – Indian American community awardee

Ava Kaur Silverstein, 17-year-old Senior at York High School in Elmhurst, IL is the Head Captain of the School Speech Team, and former District Student Council President. She also maintains a rigorous schedule, leadership roles, and academic excellence. On top of working part time at a local sandwich shop, she has achieved High Honor Roll for each semester of high school, been inducted into the National Honors Society, and was designated as an AP Scholar with Honors. Ava is a member of Brookfield Zoo Chicago's King's scholars' program, Ava has been actively involved in community service since she was 6 years old, starting her journey through Girl Scouts. Today, Ava's favorite local volunteering is at the County Wildlife Hospital and her town's Food Pantry, where she has accumulated over 120 hours of community service since 2024. Ava was named Illinois State Scholar. Ava plans to study epidemiology, genetics, and public health in college. She enjoys being outside, going to concerts, spending time with her friends, and learning new things!



Ellen Natalie Chua

Metea Valley High School – Indonesian American community awardee.

Ms. Ellen Natalie Chua is a junior at Metea Valley High School. She is part of the Varsity Swimming team and qualified for sectionals for the past 3 years and made IHSA state this season and the All-Academic All-Conference team. She organized her school's Drown Out Breast Cancer fundraiser for two years, raising money for Breast Cancer Research. She is a board member of the Healthcare Club and Chinese honors Society.

She has also played the piano for over eleven years and has volunteered for over 130 hours at Edward Hospital, playing the piano for patients there. Within her church, she has volunteered as a weekly altar server for over five years, joined her church's Mission Trip, and helped lead her church's vacation Bible School. Volunteering at her church and hospital has helped her find a passion to help others and gave her a sense of purpose and direction.



Sofia Z. Ozaki

Ball State University – Japanese American community awardee

A first-year architecture student in the highly competitive five-year accredited program at Ball State University, Sofia Ozaki is a Japanese-Pakistani American Muslim woman who represents her Asian American identity across many community spaces. She regularly volunteers at her local mosque and engages in interfaith programs as well. Throughout college, she has continued her volunteer work and runs her own at-home baking business. She currently maintains a 4.0 GPA and works as a research assistant in a National Science Fund study on daylighting and the effects on children with autism spectrum disorder. Sofia was a high honor

Asian + American

roll student at Niles West High School, as well as a National Honor Society member. Having read Executive Order 9066 at a recent Day of Remembrance event at the Chicago History Museum, and recently donating her business services to Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago, Sofia gives back in many ways.



Crystal Yuri Park

Harvard University – Korean American community awardee

Crystal Park is a first-year student at Harvard University concentrating in Government and East Asian Studies. She has long been involved in Korean cultural preservation, having served as President of the Youth Committee of the Korean American Women’s Association of Chicago, Vice President of the Chicago Korean Dance Company Youth Group, and a Junior Ambassador at the Korean Cultural Center of Chicago. At Harvard, she continues this work as Freshman Representative in the Harvard Korean Association. As an Eagle Scout, Crystal dedicated her Eagle Project to remembering “comfort women.” In high school, she founded/led the AAPI Alliance and held top leadership roles in clubs like Cultural Awareness, Student Council, Model UN, and NHS. She founded the Suburbs Chapter of the National Student Refugee Coalition and deepened her passion for cultural advocacy through public service during an internship at Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi’s office. Crystal will continue championing culture with purpose.



Summer Y. Christensen

Hoffman Estates High School - Malaysian American Community awardee.

Summer Christensen, a sophomore at Hoffman Estates High School, demonstrates exceptional dedication to community service and personal growth. She began volunteering at age eight with the Malaysian Club of Chicago, assisting with annual cultural gatherings and fundraising events, including live roti canai demonstrations at the Taste of Malaysia festival. At eleven, she joined Sukyo Mahikari, a spiritual organization focused on service and self-improvement. As an elite youth member, she contributes approximately 120 volunteer hours each year, providing audio and video technical support, assisting with overnight security, and performing various operational duties during major events.

Summer is widely recognized for her reliability, maturity, and sincere commitment to helping others. Her positive attitude, flexibility, and willingness to take initiative have earned her the respect of adults and peers alike. Outside her service activities, she enjoys One Piece, drawing, video games, and time with friends.

Asian + American



Rahim Sattar

University of Central Florida - Pakistani American community awardee

Rahim Sattar is a student leader, community builder, and emerging management professional committed to uplifting youth voices and strengthening Pakistani American representation.

He previously served as the President of the Pakistani Student Association at the University of Central Florida, becoming the first freshman to hold that role, where he led cultural programming, civic engagement initiatives, and multi-campus partnerships.

Rahim has gained experience across leadership, hospitality, and civic development. He served as an intern at Prominence Hospitality Group, supporting operational improvement, research, and community initiatives. He later contributed as an intern at Sai Venture Capital, engaging in strategy preparation, outreach, and growth-focused support. Rahim also serves on the management team for OPEN-Chicago, helping facilitate civic engagement, youth networking, and professional development within the diaspora.

He is passionate about education, entrepreneurship, and service, dedicating himself to building leadership pipelines, strengthening communities, and creating opportunities for young people to excel.



Prisara Chumsangsri

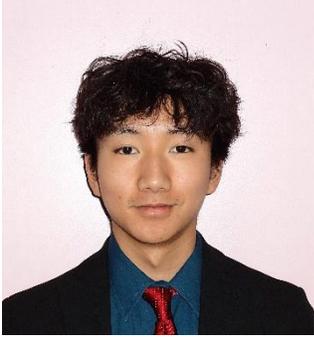
Walter Payton College Preparatory High School - Thai American community awardee

Prisara Chumsangsri, a diligent Junior at the top-ranked Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, is committed to her Thai community, excels academically, and simultaneously a triathlete of varsity lacrosse, a dedicated runner, and black belt in karate.

As the youngest elected secretary for both the Walter Payton Student Government and National Honor Society, she is an excellent leader, who organized school-wide events such as the annual AAPI Showcase. Additionally, she perpetually mentors elementary students, fostering the next generation of community leaders. Her enthusiasm regarding intersections of healthcare and engineering are displayed through her work with the Lurie Children's Hospital ICAN Advisory Network and as an intern at Rush University Medical Center, where she is a contributing author in a pediatric mental health research.

As a dedicated member of the Thai Cultural and Fine Arts Institute since 2012, Prisara continuously shares Thai traditional dance and music performances at various major events.

Asian + American



BaoMinh Ben Tran

University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign – Vietnamese American community awardee

Currently a sophomore at the U of I at Urbana-Champaign, BaoMinh maintains a 3.7GPA. BaoMinh attended elementary and middle school at Sabin Dual Language Magnet School in Chicago, where he achieved perfect attendance through the 8th grade, earned straight A's every year and received multiple 'Student of the Month' awards.

He was honored with the Yearlong Honor Roll distinction and graduated as Salutatorian of the Class of 2019.

BaoMinh continued his academic success at Lane Tech High School, earning straight A's throughout all four years. As an active member of the Volleyball Team, he demonstrated teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. He is an active member of the Vietnamese Student Association, fostering cultural awareness and student engagement.

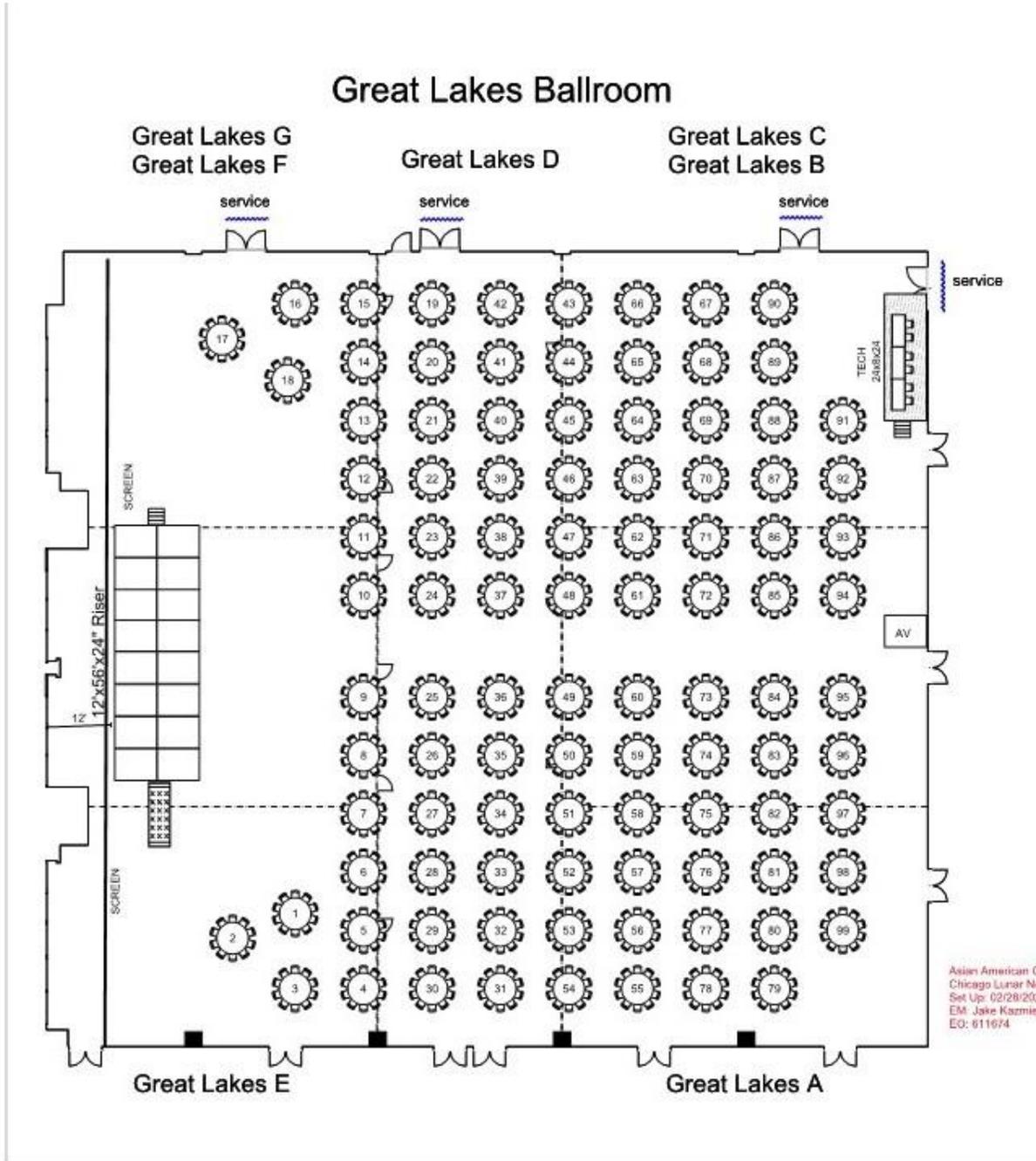
As a dedicated participant in the Truc Lam Youth Association at Truc Lam Temple, BaoMinh studied the Vietnamese language, culture, history, and Buddhism. He also volunteers at fundraising events and actively supports community initiatives. He regularly performed Vietnamese traditional youth dances and lion dance during Tet (the Vietnamese New Year) and other cultural festivals, helping preserve and share Vietnamese heritage with younger generations and the broader community.

BaoMinh Ben Tran has successfully achieved a remarkable balance of academic excellence, leadership, and cultural devotion. His achievements inspire peers and uplift the Vietnamese community.

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LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION GALA DINNER DIAGRAM

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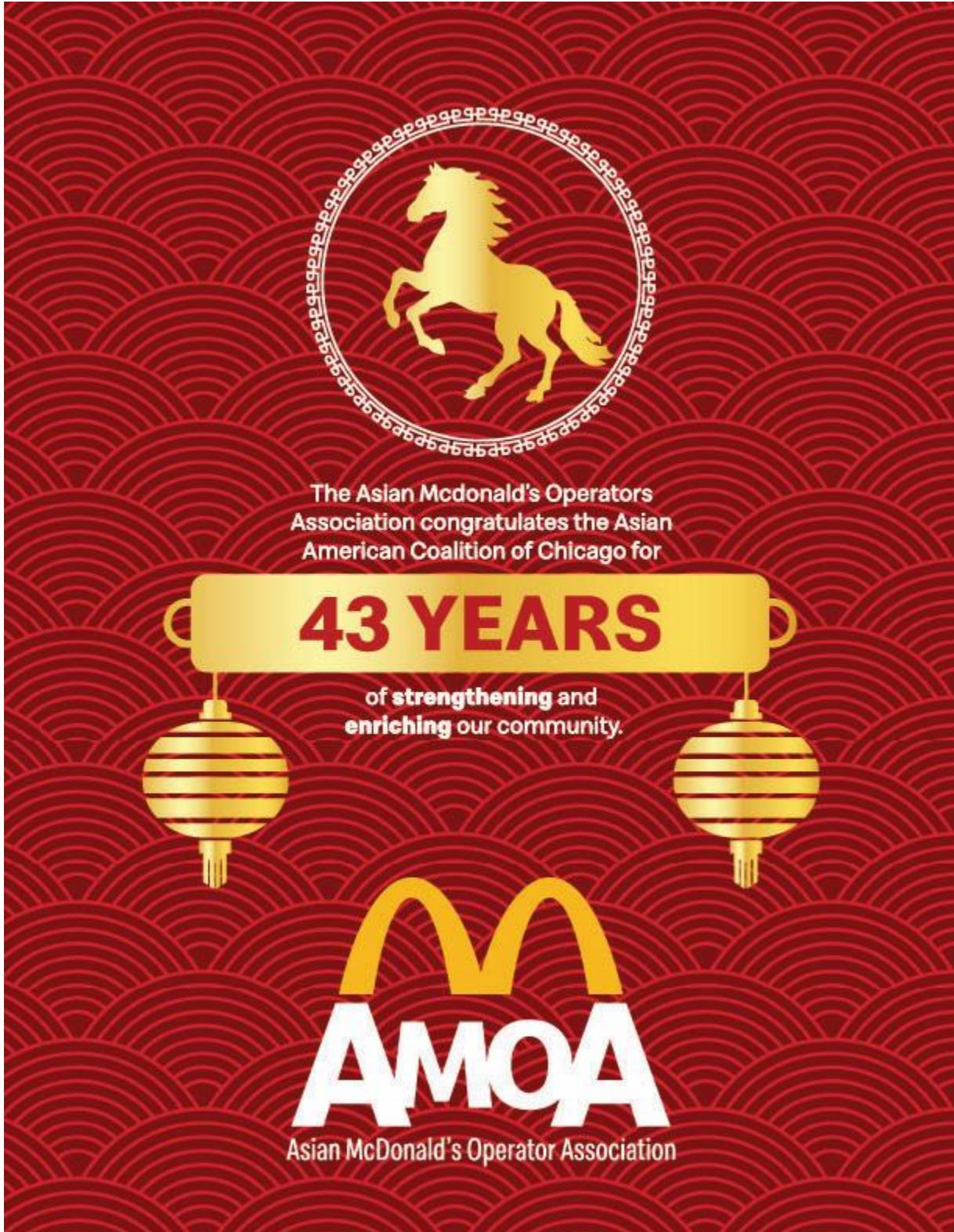


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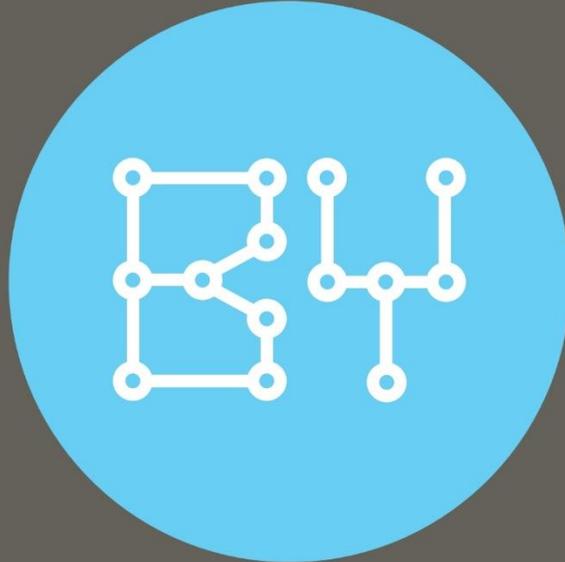


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Exemplary Community Service Award Recipient

Rahim Sattar

Youth Who Excels Award Recipient

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