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## OAPIA Update

### *News Updates from the DC Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs*

**Dear Community Members,**

The end of summer is nearing and with each season we see many changes in the District. From new businesses to new neighbors the District is always experiencing growth. The Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA) remains diligent in its efforts to outreach to the AAPI community with regards to community engagement, safety concerns, crime reporting, and government services.



Our work follows Mayor Gray's "One City" initiative, which envisions the District as a place where families reside in safe neighborhoods, every student has the opportunity to attend a good school, and every citizen's voice counts regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or ward.

Throughout the rest of year our office will update you on the progress of the Mayor's "One City Action Plan," -a set of objectives intended to stimulate and invigorate our city. You can find the Mayor's plan on our website!

OAPIA is in full support of the Mayor's larger goal to uphold the diversity and safety of our community. In an effort to achieve the "One City Vision," we will continue our legacy of advocacy and outreach. At the same time, as an office, we would like to encourage everyone to consider taking action in making our community a safer and more vibrant home for each other and the younger generation. Our weekly calendar is a good source to find out how you can get involved!

As always, OAPIA is very proud of what our office has become, which has only been possible given the support of Mayor Gray and the continued support of our community organizations, businesses, and residents.

Warm Regards,

Soohyun "Julie" Koo  
Director, DC Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Interns - Cabinet Member Interview

*By Jennifer Li, Esther Davis, and Nabani Ashraf, OAPIA Summer Youth Employment Program Interns*

As OAPIA Summer Youth Employment Program interns we were given many assignments. One assignment was to interview a DC cabinet member about their experiences as an Asian American. Each intern had separate interviews with a DC cabinet member of Asian descent.

My name is Jennifer Li and the Cabinet member I had to interview was the City Administrator, Allen Lew. As the City Administrator he has to oversee all of the current jobs and programs that are active in DC. However, Allen Lew is known for his projects that benefit the public. The projects he worked on were the Washington DC Convention Center and the Nationals Ball Park. He is also known for his refurbishing and the modernizing of many schools and facilities in the District.

During my interview I asked him questions about maintaining his personal heritage. The response I got from Allen Lew was that he is a second generation Chinese American and was born and raised in the United States. Allen Lew also stated that America is a melting pot of different cultures and therefore it is hard to identify yourself as a White, Black, Asian or etc. But most of the time he does not even think about the topic, he sees himself as a true American. He then stated that America has changed a lot since the time of segregation and American is still changing for the better.

The next question I asked him was how and what changes can the City Administrator do to increase Asian Americans civic participation. Mr. Lew said that he recently met with interns from China called the International Leadership Foundation to talk about issues they are currently facing. He then went on to say that more congressional participation will help increase Asian American civic participation. Last but not least he said that "the world is changing, China is no longer a third world country it is involving into a world superpower.

Overall my experience with Allen Lew during the interview was very insightful and resourceful. Allen Lew is a very respectable man and I had an excellent experience with him.

My name is Esther Davis. My Interview with Dr. John Thompson , Executive Director of the Department of Aging was very exciting and interesting. The meeting helped me understand the different perspectives of somebody who was not only a Cabinet member, but also an individual who came from a mixed background (1/2 Thai, 1/2 Black). I felt very inspired because Dr. Thompson explained how to embrace both cultures, which can create harmony between Blacks and Asians. Lastly he explained how each race in the D.C. metropolitan area has something unique to offer. Altogether, the interview with Dr. Thompson was a success.



My name is Nabani Ashraf. My assignment was to interview Mr. Natwar M. Gandhi, the Chief Financial Officer for the District of Columbia. During his work experience in DC government he manages the district's financial operation which includes more than 1,000 staff members in tax and administrative operations. He also participated with the Wall Street financial community where he rated agencies and the concerns in the district's financial matters.

Mr. Gandhi is a great man and he was really friendly during the interview. First I asked whether his Asian American heritage helped him to become a Cabinet member but he said skills and talents brought him to the position, not his skin color. He has worked as Chief Financial Officer for 12 years however he was then assigned 5 more years by the mayor. When I asked Mr. Gandhi about the way he maintains his heritage, he said "he does not have to maintain his heritage because it is in his genes. Immigrants always carry their heritage with them all the time." Overall my entire interview experience with Mr. Gandhi was a really great, and interesting and I learned so many things about he and his work during the interview.



### Spotlight: Major Kurt Chew-Een Lee, USMC, Retired



Major Kurt Lee holds the distinction of being the first regular non-white U.S. Marine Corps officer, and the first Asian American and Chinese American to lead combat units in the U.S. Marine Corps. He grew up in Sacramento, California and is currently retired and now resides in Washington, DC. As a young lieutenant in the Korean War, Lee faced a near impossible assignment near the Chosin Reservoir. An overwhelming enemy force was quickly surrounding a forward element of a U.S. force of 8,000 marines. Lee was assigned to lead a thrust through blinding snow, extreme cold and darkness on mountainous terrain to keep a vital road open.

Major Kurt Chew-Een Lee, USMC, Retired, recently participated in a Chinatown talk story event held on July 27th at the Chinese Community Church in DC Chinatown, and was a recipient of the [OCA](#) 2012 Pioneer Award.

## DC Mayor's Commission on APIA Community Development

The DC Commission on APIA Community Development usually convenes monthly meetings to discuss current issues affecting the DC AAPI community.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, September 26, 2012 @ 6:30 pm at the OAPIA office located at 441 4th Street, NW, Suite 721N, Washington, DC 20001.

All commission meetings are open to the public. If you have any questions about the commission or its meetings, please contact [oapia@dc.gov](mailto:oapia@dc.gov).

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