

May 09, 2006- Honoring Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

Rep. Loretta Sanchez

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Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to thank the gentleman from California for putting together this Special Order to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. Mr. Speaker, I proudly represent the largest Vietnamese community in the world outside of Vietnam, in Orange County, California. Many of them came to the United States only about thirty years ago, seeking refuge from an oppressive regime in an unknown land and facing an uncertain future. These individuals risked everything for a chance to live freely and provide better opportunities for their children and for their families.

Since their arrival, these Vietnamese refugees have become Americans in the finest and truest sense of the word--working hard to rebuild their lives and create a better future for themselves and their families. One success story that I love to mention is that of Mr. Chieu Le, founder and chief executive officer of Lee's Sandwiches in Orange County, California. In 1981, one year after immigrating to the United States from Vietnam, Mr. Le and his family bought their first catering truck and began serving sandwiches in the community. Twenty years later, they opened the first Lee's Sandwich Shop in Garden Grove, California.

Today, Lee's Sandwiches is the fastest-growing restaurant chain in the West, with over 35 stores in operation or development. And Mr. Le and his family have given back to the community as well, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for victims of the 9/11 attacks and the South Asia tsunami. But Mr. Le and his family are only one example. Dr. Nguyen-Lam Kim Oanh of the Garden Grove Unified School District is the first Vietnamese American woman elected to a school board in Orange County.

Or actress Kieu Chinh, who has appeared in numerous movies and TV shows including E.R. and The Joy Luck Club, and was the subject of the Emmy-award winning 1996 documentary "Kieu Chinh: A Journey Home." And groups such as the Union of Vietnamese Student Associations -- a non-profit, volunteer-run organization that puts together the annual Tet Festival in Orange County, which draws twenty to thirty thousand attendees. Or the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance -- the largest Pan-Asian Pacific Islander organization in Orange County. Their health outreach programs, afterschool programs, and policy advocacy programs make a real difference in the lives of Orange County residents.

Through their hard work and dedication, Vietnamese American and other Asian Pacific individuals and groups like these have become an integral part of the Orange County family - as entrepreneurs, as community leaders, and as activists for worthy causes at home and abroad. On behalf of all my colleagues in the House, I offer them our praise and our gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.