

# **The Hmong American Journey: 40 Years of Growth**

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La Crosse Rotary Club  
April 25, 2019



**But First...**  
**Did You Know...?**

- ❖ How is “Hmong” pronounced?
- ❖ What’s the plural of Hmong?
- ❖ Wisconsin is home to the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest Hmong community in the nation
  - Milwaukee is home to the 4<sup>th</sup> largest Hmong concentration in the nation
- ❖ Judge Kashoua Kristy Yang – First Hmong judge elected in the entire US is in Milwaukee
  - First Hmong woman judge in the nation



## Hmong History At-a-Glance

### ❖ Tribal minority group

- China
- Vietnam
- Laos
- Thailand

- ❖ 1950s – Hmong written language developed
- ❖ 1960s – Vietnam War aka The Secret War
  - Hmong soldiers died at a rate **10 times** as high as that of American soldiers
- ❖ Early 1970s – Crossing the Mekong River
- ❖ Mid-1970s – Hmong American Journey begins



# The Hmong American Journey

- ❖ 1970s – Political refugees in the US
  - Sponsorships
- ❖ 1980s – Second wave of Hmong refugees
  - Secondary migrations
  - Mutual Assistance Associations formed
- ❖ 1990s – Third wave of Hmong refugees
- ❖ Early 2000s – Last wave of Hmong refugees
  - Wat ThamKrabok
  - Relocation of 15,000 refugees



# The Hmong American Journey

- ❖ 2000-2010: 40% population growth
  - ❖ 2010: WI Hmong – 48,189 (undercount)
  - ❖ 2020: WI Hmong – 70,000
- ❖ 2000-2010: 15% decline in poverty
  - 62.5% Employed vs 70.2% Civilian Labor Force
    - 43% in Manufacturing vs 19% WI Population
    - Growing number of Hmong professionals
- ❖ 2013: WI Hmong Buying Power - **\$423 Million**
  - WI Federal/Local Taxes - **\$141 Million**







## Traditional Hmong Family/Clan Structure

- ❖ Patriarchal structure
- ❖ Clan-based
  - 18 clans based on last names
  - Hmong 18 Council of WI
- ❖ Hierarchy: immediate family
  - Father
  - Older brother(s) to younger brother(s)
- ❖ Hierarchy: clan
  - Clan Leader
  - Male elders



# Disruption in the Traditional Hmong Leadership Structure

## ❖ Hmong American Women

- Working outside of the home
- Higher education
- Professional careers
- Leadership positions inside AND outside the community



## ❖ Emerging Young Leaders

- Women and Men
- More vocal
- More “Americanized” – defying “tradition”





# Gaps and Disparities Continue

- ❖ Lack of capacity to service new needs of the community
  - Leadership development
  - Professional/technical skills
  - Lack of funding opportunities to build capacity
- ❖ Health disparities and inequities
  - Culturally-appropriate mental health services are urgent needs
  - Talent pipeline needed
- ❖ Economic inequality
  - Lack of wealth-building resources and knowledge
  - Lack of access to capital







**HMOOB**  
Cultural and Community Agency



**HMONG AMERICAN  
FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION INC.**  
MILWAUKEE, WI. EST. 1983



# A Community Coming of Age...

How Can You Help:

- ❖ Provide capacity-building opportunities for Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) and other Hmong nonprofits
- ❖ Partner with MAAs and other Hmong nonprofits to leverage greater support and visibility for the Hmong community
- ❖ Partner with the Hmong community on policy and systemic changes



**May yer “mine-za” Thao**

Board President,  
WUCMAA

(414) 645-8828

[mayyer@hmongchamber.org](mailto:mayyer@hmongchamber.org)

[www.hmongchamber.org](http://www.hmongchamber.org)

**Ua Tsaug!**

Executive Director,

Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce

Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce

