

**TALKING STORIES: A PANEL OF CITY OF LAS VEGAS  
EMPLOYEES, THE AAPI COMMITTEE**

Moderated by Allycia B. Murphy

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries

Director: Claytee D. White

Project Manager: Stefani Evans

Transcriber: Kristin Hicks

Editors and Project Assistants: Vanessa Concepcion, Stephen Pastorino, Teri Pastorino, Kristel Peralta, Jerwin Tiu, Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

# PREFACE



L to R: Las Vegas Councilwoman Francis Allen-Palenske with panelists Gai Phanalasy, Natasha Shahani, Joey Boquecosa, Pat Cabrera, Jennifer Rabanes, Chief Judge Cynthia Leung, and moderator Allycia B. Murphy.

## CITY OF LAS VEGAS ASIAN-AMERICAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMITTEE

The AAPI Committee (“Committee”) began when a few City of Las Vegas employees connected organically through conversations surrounding food, home towns, name origins, native languages and dialects, cultural traditions, and holiday celebrations. These conversations became the foundational identifiers to acknowledge AAPI Heritage Month. Coincidentally, Councilwoman Francis Allen-Palenske, who proudly speaks about her Korean heritage, hosted a Ramen Bar meet-and-greet in the Las Vegas City Hall’s NOW Café. Members introduced

themselves and, similarly to the formation of the committee, organically discussed celebrating our heritage. Since then, Councilwoman Allen-Palenske and her team have been supportive collaborators ensuring the success of AAPI Appreciation Day. The Committee has grown to over fifty members who are of Filipino, Korean, Kanaka Maoli, Japanese, Chamorro, Samoan, Taiwanese, Tongan, Indian, and Chinese backgrounds.

## AAPI APPRECIATION DAY

The initial Committee meeting was held on December 19, 2022. At this initial discussion, it was decided that the first celebratory event should focus on bringing our AAPI colleagues and allies together by elevating and educating our City of Las Vegas colleagues about the rich diversity within AAPI heritages. May 11, 2023 was chosen for the first AAPI Appreciation Day. It was chosen to coordinate with the City's regularly scheduled food truck Thursdays, in an effort to highlight small businesses that serve Asian or Pacific Islander cuisine. The panel was held at Las Vegas City Hall in honor of the first AAPI Appreciation Day. The Committee invited several local AAPI cultural performers, organizations, and social, cultural, and advocacy groups to celebrate, honor, and recognize the city's AAPI employees across all departments. The day featured a variety of traditional snacks, performances, crafts, and the panel, all representing the diverse identities of the City's AAPI employees.

## THE PANEL

The panel, "Talking Stories: A Panel of City of Las Vegas Employees, the AAPI Committee," featured six panelists and a moderator, all employees of the City of Las Vegas. The moderator was Allycia B. Murphy, Deputy City Attorney, Office of the City Attorney, Criminal Division. Panelists included Cynthia Leung, Chief Judge for Las Vegas Municipal Court; Jennifer Rabanes, Recreation Coordinator at Centennial Hills Active Adult Center; Patricia Cabrera, Enterprise Records Officer, Office of the City Clerk; Joey Boquecosa, Equipment Operator, Public Works; Natasha Shahani, Senior Public Information Officer; and Soukpaseut "Gai" Phanalasy, Multimedia Production Specialist.

The purpose of the panel was to create a safe place to have a transparent discussion of the importance of representation and recognition of Asian and Pacific Islanders, bringing awareness of commonalities between wide ranges of cultures. The panelists were asked to participate in an informal talk story session, as if they were talking amongst friends. They focused on what brought them to Las Vegas, being a part of the AAPI community, their upbringing, and why recognizing AAPI heritage is important. From the start, the panelists opened the discussion with vulnerability. The audience was seen wiping away tears of compassion and acknowledgment. The panelists, most meeting for the first time, ended their heartfelt conversation by hugging one another.

We plan on making this open conversation a tradition for AAPI Heritage Month and hope you enjoy, learn, or relate to what is being discussed.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Talking Stories: A Panel of City of Las Vegas Employees, the AAPI Committee  
May 11, 2023  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Moderated by Allycia B. Murphy

Preface.....	iv
Panel introductions and reasons for coming to Las Vegas.....	1–8
Favorite food traditions and what panelists would like to tell their great-grandparents about Asian American and Pacific Islander life and identity today.....	8–11
Gai Phanalasy education.....	12
What this AAPI Appreciation Day means.....	13–16
Appendix: Handouts and Selected Photographs.....	17–25

**[May 11, 2023] Good afternoon. Aloha. [Not English] for being here today. Welcome. Again, thank you all for being here. This next portion of our event we're calling our Talking Stories. We have a wonderful panel of folks that represent the City of Las Vegas and are representative of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. I think that it is important to recognize that the ethnic term of *Asian American* began in Berkeley, California, in the 1960s. It was part of a political movement to organize the diverse U.S. Asian population. The creation of an Asian identity was in reaction to a long history of exclusion of Asians in the country, including the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and a pair of Supreme Court cases. With that, what I'd like to do is ask our panelists to introduce themselves, and we'll start here on my right with Chief Judge Cynthia Leung.**

**CL:** Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Cynthia Leung, and I am the Chief Judge for Las Vegas Municipal Court.

**JR:** Hi, everybody. My name is Jennifer Rabanes. I am the recreation coordinator at Centennial Hills Active Adult Center.

**PC:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Pat Cabrera. I'm the Enterprise records officer working out of the office of the city clerk.

**JB:** I am Joey Boquecosa. I'm an equipment operator at Public Works.

**NS:** I am Natasha Shahani, and I'm a senior public information officer in the Department of Communications.

**GP:** I'm Gai Phanalasy. I'm also with Department of Communications, and I am the multimedia production specialist.

**Thank you, everyone. I have the distinct honor—and my name is Allycia Murphy. I am a deputy city attorney with our City Attorney's Office in the Criminal Division. I have the**



**distinct honor of speaking with our panelists today. How is that you ended up here in Las Vegas? We'll start with you, Joey, since you have our microphone.**

**JB:** Thank you, Allycia. I have to read this, because I don't want to leave anyone out that came before us. In the '60s and early '70s, AAPI icon, the mega-talented performer Nalani Kele had a hugely successful Polynesian Revue show that had a residency at the Stardust for fourteen years. It started with the trio of Mahi Beamer; his sister, Sunbeam Beamer; and Nalani. They performed as a trio and were backed musically by The Kalima Brothers. In Nalani's words, "It was a magical time. Las Vegas was mafia run and booming with the Rat Pack and the biggest names in show business in the main showrooms. The hotel, which was the newest hotel on the Strip, saw the potential in us for a unique entertainment venue so suggested we add more girls and do a revue; hence, the *Nalani Kele's Polynesian Revue* was born."

They performed in the open showroom, free to the public, but across from *Lido de Paris*, the first artistic, topless, European show in Vegas. It was a hugely popular show that benefited *Nalani Kele's Polynesian Revue*. It became a hit show on the Vegas Strip. She learned and performed cultural dances from Hawai'i, Samoa, Tahiti, Maori, Filipino, Korean, and Japanese.

Nalani came across a Limbo World Championship contest on TV held for several weeks. The world champion was my Uncle Ben, AKA Ben Limbo; that was his stage name. He would take two beer bottles, a stick, and light it on fire and shimmy under it. The crowd loved it, and Nalani was impressed and asked Ben Limbo to join her Polynesian Revue as a specialty act. Uncle Ben then brought his three brothers, baby sister, and my grandparents to Vegas from the Philippines. *Nalani Kele's Polynesian Revue* really became ohana, and sadly, once the fourteen-year run came to an end, ohana disbanded and went their separate ways.

Actually, back to me [and] the Vegas icon Nalani Kele: I listened to her talk stories when she came from Hawai'i to Vegas for Uncle Ben's funeral in 2014. [Crying] Sorry. I want to acknowledge Nalani's contribution to Vegas and her legacy and Uncle Ben's place in Vegas history. Thank you.

**PC:** I cannot follow that, Joey.

I have been in Las Vegas for almost twenty-three years. Prior to my being here, I actually moved back to Guam, where I'm from, and I was working in the government of Guam for about nine years. But before that, I actually lived on the East Coast, and I really wanted to come back to the United States, and I wanted to replicate where I was living in the United States prior to moving back to Guam, which was Columbia, Maryland. And so, I did a lot of research online through the internet and found that Henderson, Nevada, actually came very close to the type of living that I wanted to do here in Las Vegas, and so we decided to move here in 2000. At the time, Guam was going through an economic downturn, and I really just wanted to get out. You get, what we call in Guam, "island fever," because you're just surrounded by water, and so I wanted to come back to the United States and feel free to travel, because anytime that you travel from Guam, it's very, very expensive.

I know that Allycia is going to be going through some of these other questions about what we miss most about being away from our hometown, but that is what brought me here, and I brought my family with me. We still have a lot of family back in Guam. As you can imagine, when you're from an Asian or Pacific Island community, you have an extensive family, and so we still have a lot of people back in Guam, and I'm really proud to represent them here. Thank you.

**JR:** For me, I had just graduated college, and I knew I never wanted to stay in Hawai'i. I always had this dream of traveling everywhere, and I have. I've been to fifteen countries, seen all fifty states. I had graduated college, and my ex, at the time, had won keno—won ten thousand dollars—and so the kids and I moved up sooner than we anticipated, and that's how I ended up in Vegas, almost twenty-five years now.

**CL:** I came here for work. I went to UC Berkeley for my undergrad. I went to Southwestern for law school. I had never been to Las Vegas prior to moving here in 1997. My father, who is a retired architect, had built some Smith's Food King stores in the '70s, and so he had this connection to Las Vegas. I needed to relocate from Los Angeles because there are just so many lawyers in Southern California. He said, "You need to be in a town that's growing. You need to be in a place that's booming, and Las Vegas is going to be—and is—that place." I came here in 1997, took the bar, passed the bar.

Where I grew up is a small town, Palm Desert, California, in Southern California, and it wasn't unlike how I experienced Las Vegas. From the legal community perspective, it [Las Vegas] was a very small community even though this is an international tourist town, and I really loved that. When I came here, I was a defense attorney, and the defense bar really embraced me. I thought, *Well, this is definitely my new home.* How I came to the City is because the City Attorney's Office kept seeing me appear in court all the time, and they're like, "You know, you're on the wrong side. Maybe you should come work for the City Attorney's Office," and I did that in 1999. In 2008, I was appointed by the City Council to be the first Chinese American woman appointed to the bench in Las Vegas Municipal Court system. [Audience clapping]

Thank you. Thank you, Councilwoman [Allen-Palenske], for having this event. I just need to say that right now. To have this opportunity and forum to celebrate our stories.

I've been reelected three times since that time. I really love Las Vegas. It's a place of opportunity and a place of innovation, I think; and that's why I have stayed, and my parents subsequently retired here.

**GP:** Hello. My name is Gai Phanalasy, again. I ended up in Las Vegas in 2016, so I'm going to go back a little bit. My parents are from Laos, Southeast Asia. If you have not heard of Laos, it's in between Thailand and Vietnam, and Cambodia is right there, too, so it's in that part of the world. My parents met in Laos.

At one point, a communist government took over the country, and a lot of Lao people fled the country for opportunities, or maybe they were being persecuted, but there were a lot of different reasons why people left Laos. My parents left, like a lot of Lao people did back then, and my mother and father decided to leave Laos, like a lot of other families, by crossing the Mekong River. The Mekong River is pretty much like the Mississippi River over there in Southeast Asia, and a lot of families would flee at night on a raft, a boat, a canoe, maybe an inflated trash bag. [They would] cross over into Thailand because there were a lot of refugee camps over there, where people would get set up and move onto the next chapter of life. But my parents, one night, decided to go. My brother was nine, my sister was four, and my mother was pregnant with me, and they decided to go. There were these people that had a canoe submerged in the Mekong River, and they brought the boat up at night, and the family got in the boat, and we crossed the river and crossed over to Thailand.

Once my family got into Thailand, we were apprehended by the Thai officials, Thai authorities, and we were put into the refugee camps. Three days later in the refugee camp, I was born. I was born in a refugee camp, pretty much in a bamboo hut. I have some pictures; I can prove it. I was born in the camp, and we were there for about three months. There were several

refugee camps along the border in Thailand. My peers ask, “Oh, which refugee camp? Were you born in America? Were you born in Thailand? Were you born in Laos?” Everyone sort of has a different story.

We were in Thailand for about three months. A lot of nations were granting political asylum to these families. Today, I have family in Australia, in France, in Canada, different parts of the U.S. My parents got granted political asylum in the United States in Nashville, Tennessee, so I grew up in Nashville. We were in Thailand, in this town called Nong Khai, in the refugee camp there for three months, and then we got transferred to another refugee camp in Manila, Philippines, and were there for about seven months; we landed in Nashville, Country Music, USA, before I turned one. We were there, and I grew up in and around Middle Tennessee, in Nashville. My parents’ first jobs were in the hospitality industry. They were making, like, three dollars and twenty-five cents an hour at Opryland Hotel; that was my parents’ first jobs, and then they got jobs doing factory work. That’s where they raised us, and that’s where I grew up.

Then I had a job opportunity out here in Las Vegas. I fell in love with photography, and I had an opportunity with photography out here. I came out here, and the rest is history.

**If we can just hold questions for one minute.**

**NS:** I’m sandwiched between two very tough acts to follow. Let’s start with...I’m Indian, which is in Asia. I know that’s been a question. Somebody said, “Is India in AAPI?” One hundred percent Asian. Hard to keep track of sometimes. But we grew up, my brother and I, very confused, because my parents were born and raised in the Philippines. Both parents were born and raised in the Philippines. There is a large Indian population in the Philippines. Our summers every few years, instead of going to summer camp, we got shipped off to the Philippines, and that’s where we had our summers. We were Indian—well, we *are* Indian, but we grew up there,

and we acclimated into the Filipino culture, so confused, confused to everybody. My parents will speak Tagalog in a supermarket, and people will be like, “Excuse me?” And we’re like, “Yep, yep, we can understand every word you’re saying and can communicate with you.”

My family, at one point in the 1980s, my parents’ generation, their parents were encouraging them to move to the United States before they turned eighteen or twenty-one—I can’t remember—there was some rule that if you come here then, it’s easier to get citizenship. So, to come to get a better life, to then petition their family members to then join them here.

My parents were dating when my dad moved to the United States, and they tell stories of how long-distance phone calls were so expensive that they would drive to Phoenix, Arizona, or something because it was cheaper to make phone calls in Arizona, just to call back to the Philippines and talk to their loved ones.

Meanwhile, my mom was finishing medical school in the Philippines. She graduated from med school and got married, I think, within a day or two. Unfortunately, because the medical degrees don’t transfer, she moved to the United States and then wasn’t able to practice. She always says, “My wedding was more like a funeral because everyone was sobbing,” because they got married, and then they both moved back to the United States the next day or days after.

It was culture shock for my mom. Like Pat mentioned, when you grow up in an AAPI family, you’re surrounded by people. To then come to the United States, where there was just a small group of them—in fact, in a Los Angeles apartment building. Everyone lived in this apartment building. When my dad’s parents finally moved into that building, I remember you could go to the third floor, and these people were here; you could go to the first floor, and these people were here. It was everyone’s starting point in Los Angeles.

My parents are immigrants, and that is something that I take a lot of pride in, because I, as the oldest child and the oldest grandchild, have watched my aunts and uncles and parents work very hard to give us the lives that we were blessed to have. Some of my cousins don't realize that, because by the time they were born, our parents had gone from temp jobs to permanent jobs to more stable jobs. I remember when we were all crowded in one area growing up.

My parents moved from the Philippines to Los Angeles, and then after I graduated college, I was in L.A. It's hard to find opportunities sometimes. I totally followed along Judge. There was somebody I was following on Twitter—shocking, I'm on the social media team. He was Indian, and he was the director of entertainment at Cosmopolitan. I was like, *This is great. I love to look up to people that are part of my culture, that are part of AAPI as they set and paved the way.* I found out he was starting a musical festival in Las Vegas; sent him a DM [direct message]. I was like, "I'm going to be in Vegas. Can I come work for you?" He was like, "Let's have lunch." He took me to lunch. He became like my big brother here. Then I moved from Los Angeles to intern. I quit my job—which, my parents were not happy about that—to intern in Las Vegas. I moved here and helped start what is now Life is Beautiful Festival. That is the whole story of how I got here personally.

**I think everyone who had an opportunity to try out the very delicious and very cooling and refreshing desert would love to know the name of it.**

**NS:** Yes. I didn't make it even though Joey gave me credit. I can't cook very well. It is a pandan *tres leches*. *Tres leches* is a very common Spanish-Hispanic dish. There is a lot of Spanish influence in the Philippines because of all of the times it was turned around from one colonization to another. This is actually made with pandan, which is like an aromatic plant. It's

very similar to vanilla. They use pandan in the Philippines similarly to how people would use vanilla here. It's coconut based. There is a dessert in the Philippines called *buko* pandan, and *buko* means coconut. The *tres leches* is soaked in coconut water. The *buko* pandan is one of my dad's favorite desserts. My husband, who is white as white can be, loves the dessert; I can't stand it, and so it was really weird that he came in and he took to that. This version I really enjoy, because it combines all the flavors in a different way. She makes Filipino pastries and desserts—not necessarily more approachable, but does new takes on them—and she is a local AAPI woman who does a pop-up business. I found her a couple of years ago, and we try and support her as much as possible. [Her name is Kimmie, and her shop is MILKFISH Bakeshop.]

**Thank you so much for sharing that. I think that is very interesting and not that hard to see that our eating habits and our preferred dishes often make us feel closer to our ethnic identities. I'm going to ask Pat to share some of your favorite food dishes from childhood.**

PC: Food dishes or snacks?

**Snacks, food dishes.**

PC: I actually like this thing called Botan rice candy from Japan. There's only six in this box, and it's gotten really, really expensive. When I was growing up, it was fifty cents, and now it's almost three dollars. I can literally buy a lot of those and just eat them like nobody's business.

The other snacks that we do in Guam is that we tend to pickle everything. We pickle papaya. We pickle mango. We pickle this thing called *daigo*, which is a Japanese daikon radish. Guamanians or Chamorros in general, love spice, and so anytime we can get boonie peppers in something, that is exactly what we would do. Those are the snacks that we have.

I'm going to make a plug for a food truck that's downstairs right now, Tuna FIXXX.

They actually offer traditional Chamorro dishes. Most of it is barbeque. But a lot of the things we



do, Natasha—because Guam is actually a United States territory, and when you talk about being confused, we cross the line being both Chamorro and westernized—a lot of our influences come from Japan and the Spanish, because we were colonized by the Spaniards in 1898 and then became United States citizens through an Organic Act in 1953, so we have all of those influences. A lot of the things that we do in our cooking involves soy sauce, and there are a lot of similarities with the Filipino culture because we have chicken adobo, we have *pancit*, and we have *lumpia*. For you people out there, that is an eggroll. We don't call it that, but that's what that is.

**I'm going to ask one additional person because we have had several conversations and a loved affection for snacks. Judge Leung, I did hear you excited about some of the snacks we have today, so I'm going to ask you to share some of your favorites.**

**CL:** White rabbit candy—oh, my gosh, that is something that I remember from my childhood, which we could not get in Palm Desert. Palm Desert, in the '70s, is literally a desert, not this lush, amazing place that it is now. We would go into Chinatown in L.A. and just stock up on things like that. The Chinese candies I remember my grandmother would bring when she would visit us for whatever holiday. My dad's side of the family is from Palo Alto in Northern California, and a lot of Chinese snacks were fruit, fruit based, a lot of dried sugar, fruit-based things, and so I remember growing up eating that and enjoying that.

My mom would make a comfort food for me. She was from China. My father is from California. He's Cantonese, she spoke Mandarin, and so we spoke English because they didn't talk to each other in Chinese. But she would make this egg custard thing, which I don't know if this is Cantonese, but it was my comfort if I didn't feel good, if I felt sick. It's literally an egg that she would beat with a little sesame oil and soy sauce and then put it in the steamer.

Sometimes there were scallions on it, and then we would eat that with rice. Those are the kinds of things that I remember.

But your array of snacks, excellent, excellent.

**Thank you. My next question, we'll start with Jen. What is one thing that you wish that you could tell your great-grandparents about the evolution of being an Asian American or Pacific Islander?**

**JR:** I'm Filipino, but I grew up in Hawai'i. You want to talk about confused? We are confused. There are so many ethnicities there. You have the Chinese, the Japanese. You have Korean. You have Filipino. For my grandmothers and my mom—I'm going to cry. *Why? Stop it.* They were plantation workers. They worked the pineapple fields. They picked the pineapple. What I would like to tell them now—they passed on, but I would like to tell them that we are no longer identified as plantation workers. We are Grammy winners, right? We're Grammy winners. We're engineers. We're rec coordinators. We are so much more than that.

**Coming to you next, Joey.**

**JB:** Let's go.

**If you could talk to your great-grandparents and tell them something about life as Asian American and Pacific Islander identity, what would you like to tell them?**

**JB:** We're represented now. We have a World Champion boxer. We have a world-famous comedian who sells out the L.A. Coliseum. I just saw yesterday, an eighteen-year-old Filipino F-1 racecar driver just won a championship over in Europe somewhere. We're represented now. I've been here for twenty-two years at the City, and this is the first time in twenty-two years I've seen something like this since—it's making me cry, so I'll pass the mike.

**Gai, we're going to come to you next, and I'm going to switch it up just a little bit, because we did have a question from the audience, and so we'll go on that. What do you miss most about your hometown? And if you could, just tell us a little bit about your education, if you were educated there in Nashville.**

**GP:** My hometown of Nashville, Tennessee. Yes, I grew up in Nashville. My first memory is, like, four years old. I just remember growing up and speaking both English and Lao, so it was natural and common. I had nothing else to compare it to. I had a great childhood. My parents made it really wonderful. We lived in a duplex in a not-so-great part of Nashville, but they made it happen, and they made my childhood incredible. I would say my childhood was pleasant. I went to a private school for the first three years of grade school, and then we moved out into the country. I made a lot of friends in the neighborhood. It was a pleasant time. There are probably lots of stories, but it was good.

As far as education, I wasn't really a great student. I did high school, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I would say that with the Lao Americans first generation, or 1.5 generation they call it, you kind of are in your own culture a lot of times, and then you have friends who are American, and they have different cultures. But then, sometimes, like my parents who worked in the factories, they're like, "Hey, go to school and study hard and go work in an office." That was my parents' aspirations for me. But their peers kind of all did the same thing, and so we had no role models. We didn't know people who were judges. We didn't know people who were attorneys or doctors or dentists or musicians. We didn't know those people.

When I graduated high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I did experiment with a lot of different things I was interested in. It took me a while to find photography. I did various jobs, and I was like, *This is not it; I don't feel this. I'm making money, but it's not fulfilling for*

*me*. I think that I found photography, and I really fell in love with it and got really good. It led to other opportunities out here in Las Vegas. I get to tell stories out here, which is really fun. I tell other people's stories.

**Thank you. We're going to get ready to wrap up. I know we're running a little bit on islander time here. As we finish up with these last things, I wanted to say that it's important to recognize that our AAPI community represents more than ten percent of the population here in Clark County. [All clapping] [Indiscernible] in the U.S. I think we're represented here, as well in the City, so that's Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. For the panel, for our last question, what does this AAPI Appreciation Day mean to you?**

**GP:** First of all, I want to thank Tia [Ka'auamo] and you and [Indiscernible due to audience clapping] Thank you for putting together this event. I love all the candies up there. Talk about the candies brought me back to my childhood, and seeing those performers out there and just celebrating our different cultures. It makes me feel really good to come to a workplace and to see this happening at City Hall in Las Vegas. Like you were saying, you've never seen this, and you've been here for twenty-two years. I've never seen it in a workplace where Asian culture or heritage is celebrated, so I really appreciate it. What was the question again?

**You answered it, so we'll go to Natasha next.**

**NS:** I think growing up as a first-generation born American, I didn't embrace either culture very well—like Indian and Filipino—because you try to assimilate yourself to your friends and to school and not to be... I always joke about this. I got Thermos lunch, like in a Thermos, packed rice, meat, vegetables, like your *baon* was in a cooler. I carried a cooler. I wanted the Lunchables

because everybody had the Lunchables. You're like, *What food are you bringing? Just give me the peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Mom, just give me the peanut butter and jelly sandwich.*

**PC:** They'll say no.

**NS:** I know. Now I'm like, *Why?* I would kill for somebody to make me a *baon* in my family to take to work these days.

It wasn't cool to be of a culture. Then all of a sudden, I got into my teens, and it was cool to be Indian, and it was cool to have heritage. It took me so long to embrace where I was from and where my family was from. It is so special to be able to celebrate that now, and not only to celebrate it, but to share it and to learn from others and that there are finally people accepting awards on award shows like the Grammys and the Oscars, and there are people who are owning businesses, and there are people who are in politics that look like me and who have similar backgrounds. To finally be able to celebrate our cultures and to know we are here and we are not going anywhere; so, get to know us, get to know our cultures, get to know where we're from because we have so much to offer as a whole community.

**JB:** That's great. That was great. That sums it up. Like my friend back there, John Francis, he's here today, and we're very underrepresented out in the field, and so this is a big deal for us, and Eric Jansen. We're all out in the field, and everyone has an important role to make the machine work. I'm glad we're all here to acknowledge each other. That's about it. Thank you.

**JR:** As you said, Joey, I think Natasha and Gai summed this up. I think as a community—and we represent so many different ones being from the Asian and Pacific Island rim—I think we should be loud and proud of who we are and there shouldn't be any embarrassment about that. I want to cry. *What's happening?*

**JC:** I don't know. When I was growing up, I was told that you need to embrace the western culture and you need to assimilate, but it's great seeing the differences that we have and the fact that the City of Las Vegas is actually recognizing who we are as AAPI representatives. I hope that this continues, because it really makes a lot of sense for a lot of people, and our community is never going away.

**JR:** I don't know what's happening, oh, my gosh. For me, because I grew up in Hawai'i and there are so many different cultures from AAPI community, right, that coming here to Vegas, it was such a culture shock because I couldn't find culture. There was nothing available. Throughout the years, we have our Pure Alohas and we have our Japanese Festival at Sammy Davis [Jr. Festival Plaza in Lorenzi Park]—shouting out to Parks and Rec—we have our Day of the Dead celebration, which Gerardo and I do, but there was no culture. So, now to have something like this [AAPI Appreciation Day], it's like, wow, *Yea us, Yea us*, it's so great. I appreciate just being recognized for our culture and sharing it with us. Our Caucasian friends, and no offense by that, but they don't understand our heritage. They don't understand how tight knit our families are because of our culture. It's great to share that.

**CL:** What I think is going on is validation, and that is the emotion that we are all feeling today because we have all quietly in our own way represented who we are, our heritage, our personal background, and we are here, period. This day is a celebration of all of that. We're all very emotional because it's like, *finally*.

Councilwoman, thank you. Finally. That's what the emotion is about, so thank you. Thank you for giving us that forum for being able to say to the community not just that we're here, but we see you, I see you, we see each other, and that's where this heartfelt emotion is coming from. That's how that makes me feel and this day makes me feel.

**Thank you so much to everyone on our panel. Thank you all for staying with us. I will just end with, in the hundred and nineteen years as the City of Las Vegas, we've always been here, we will continue to be here, and we are very proud.**

**[End of recorded panel discussion]**

## **APPENDIX**



## HANDOUTS AND SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS



AAPI Appreciation Day welcome table included informational resources and acknowledgments, such as an explanation of the Committee, how the Committee was created, how AAPI Appreciation Day was planned, the meaning of a lei, and a Spotify playlist that the Committee created (also provided in this book).



Members of the Committee loaned family heirlooms to be showcased during AAPI Appreciation Day, which included paintings, recipe books, cultural books, photos, news articles, art collections, traditional accessories, cultural foods, instruments, and hula implements.

# ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) APPRECIATION DAY

**THURSDAY, MAY 11 • 11 A.M.-2 P.M.  
NOW CAFÉ • SECOND FLOOR CITY HALL**

There will be games, prizes and entertainment.  
Snacks will be provided.  
Food trucks will be located behind City Hall.  
Hula and Origami workshops will be held as a first-come, first-served basis.  
More information will be available soon.

*If you are interested in joining the city of Las Vegas' AAPI Committee, please contact Tia Ka'auamo or Pat Cabrera.*

# ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) APPRECIATION DAY

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

MAY 11, 2023 | 11 A.M.-2 P.M. | NOW Café & Patio

- 11 a.m. .... Welcoming Remarks and Proclamation by Councilwoman Francis Allen-Palenske
- 11:05 a.m. .... AAPI Committee Hula Choreographed by David Balberdi  
Song: Ka Uluwehi O Ke Kai
- 11:10 a.m. .... Performance: Tendō Baikōki
- 11:25 a.m. .... Remarks by Mayor Carolyn Goodman
- 11:35 a.m. .... Cultural Clothing Showcase by Members of AAPI Committee
- 11:50 a.m. .... Performance: Na Hula Halli'a Aloha
- 12:05 p.m. .... Performance: Yosakoi Dance by SAZAN
- 12:25 p.m. .... UNLV Oral Reflections Project Presentation by Stefani Evans
- 12:30 p.m. .... Talking Stories: A panel discussion with Chief Judge Cynthia Leung, Gai Phanalasy, Jennifer Rabanes, Joey Boquecosa, Natasha Shahani and Patricia Cabrera. Moderated by Alycia Murphy
- Games and Raffle
- 1:25 p.m. .... Musical Selections: Hui o Anakaia Ray
- 1:55 p.m. .... Closing Remarks
- 2 p.m. .... Hula Basics Workshop with David Balberdi (City Hall, Training Room 1)

**Workshops will be held in the NOW Café while supplies last:**

- 11 a.m. - Noon .... Origami cranes with Erika Ozaki
- 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. .... Stamp clips with Chio Kimura
- Noon .... Kukui nut keychains with Kumu Charles from Na Hula Halli'a Aloha

*Subject to change*

# ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) APPRECIATION DAY

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

*We appreciate you all for funding, performing, speaking, and contributing your time and efforts to ensure the success of AAPI Appreciation Day*

Mayor Carolyn G. Goodman Councilwoman Francis Allen-Palenske City Manager Jorge Cervantes Chief Judge Cynthia Leung Chief Fernando Gray City Attorney Bryan Scott Assistant City Attorney Jeffrey Dorocak City Clerk LuAnn Holmes AAPI Committee Centennial Hills Active Adult Center City of Las Vegas Marketing & Printing Team Hui o Anakaia Ray Na Hula Halli'a Aloha Sazan Yosakoi Tendō Baikōki UNLV Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American & Pacific Islander Oral History Project Team Art & Design Adam Porsborg Alycia Murphy	Brenda Flank Candace Boring Cathy Meagher Chio Kimura Christie Garness and Team David Balberdi David Riggleman Dina Babsky Emily Ku Erika Ozaki Gai Phanalasy Gerardo Luevanos Jasmine Freeman Jennifer Rabanes Joey Boquecosa Jordan Moore Karen Adams Kelli Hansen Kelly Schwarz Kim Barrera Kristina Hayes Nalani Aki Natasha Shahani	Patricia Cabrera Patsy McFadden Ramiro Reyes Randy Robison Robin McCartney Rosa Cortez Shane Locklair Shannon Bentham Stefani Evans Stefanie Hui Steve Ford Tia Ka'auamo and 'ohana
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*And, to all those who have and continue to donate origami cranes for the senbazuru.*

For more information on the AAPI Committee or to become involved please contact:  
**Tia Ka'auamo** (tkaaauamo@lasvegasnevada.gov)  
**Pat Cabrera** (pcabrera@lasvegasnevada.gov)

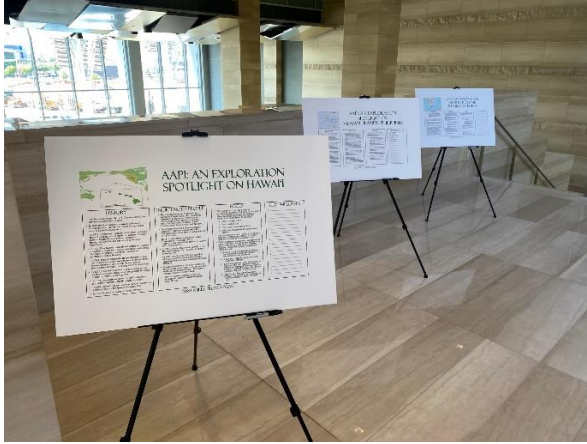
# ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE MONTH

S A T M O N  
M A Y O I M A Y 31

MUSIC IS THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE... IT BRINGS PEOPLE CLOSER TOGETHER.  
-AUTHOR: ELLA FITZGERALD

## CHECK OUT OUR AAPI APPRECIATION DAY SOUNDTRACK

Available on Spotify



In an effort to educate on various Asian regions and Pacific Islands, while including City employees who are ethnically connected with these regions, the Committee created spotlights to explain the history, indigenous people and food of these regions, and allowing City employees to represent their culture.



Turnout for the City's first AAPI Appreciation Day.



Kumu Charles of Na Hula Hali'a Aloha hosted a table workshop on how to make kukui nut keychains.



Top left: Erika Ozaki, a member of the Committee, hosted a table workshop on how to make origami cranes. The Committee made and gifted a senbazuru to the City of Las Vegas. A senbazuru is a thousand crane display, symbolic in Japan for peace and good wishes. Some of these were donated cranes from AAPI Appreciation Day.



Performers of Tendo Baikoki cultural dance group pose in the City Hall lobby. Fumiko Duncan, a certified master instructor of traditional Japanese Tendo dance, appears in the floral kimono.



Chio Kimura hosted a table workshop on how to make clip art.



Left: Sazan Yosakoi performing in the patio of Las Vegas City Hall for AAPI Appreciation Day.



At the Welcome Table, Committee member Karen Adams hands out a lei at AAPI Appreciation Day.



Panelists L to R: Gai Phanalasy, Natasha Shahani, Joey Boquecosa starting off the panel, Pat Cabrera, Jennifer Rabanes, and Chief Judge Cynthia Leung.



The AAPI Committee coordinated and performed hula opening performance for AAPI Appreciation Day.  
 Performers L to R:  
 David Balberdi (coordinator), Nalani Aki, Robin McCartney, Candace Boring, and Sanaa Khan.



Kūpuna of ukulele group Hui o Anakala Ray, who sang, played ukulele, and even danced hula for AAPI Appreciation Day.



Las Vegas Municipal Court Chief Judge Cynthia Leung explaining a family heirloom, a traditional bamboo rice paper painting made by her mother, to Senior Management Analyst Robin McCartney.



Traditional Hawaiian ti-leaf lei that were made by the Committee. The leaves were brought in from Tia Ka'auamo's family from Hawai'i, and she showed the Committee how to make a lei to gift for the first AAPI Appreciation Day at the city of Las Vegas.



The cultural clothing showcase was created to highlight traditional or commonly worn Asian and Pacific Islander attire featuring Councilwoman Allen-Palenske and the Committee. L to R: Natasha Shahani in her kurta (casual attire commonly worn in South Asia), Councilwoman Francis Allen-Palenske in her traditional Korean hanbok, Pat Cabrera in her mestiza (traditional Chamorro dress), David Balberdi in his Sigzane aloha shirt, Allycia Murphy in her puletasi (Samoan formal dress), Tia Ka'auamo in her yukata (Japanese casual version of a kimono), Stefanie Hui in her chut thai (traditional Thai outfit), Joey Boquecosa in his barong (traditional men's outfit worn in the Phillipines), and emcee Nalani Aki.



L to R: Pat Cabrera, Councilwoman Francis Allen-Palenske, and Tia Ka'auamo.



AAPI Appreciation Day snack table. The Committee members donated snacks that they enjoy now and did growing up, such as rice crackers, mochi, pineapple flavored gummies, lychee jelly, and many more.



Panelists shown L to R: Gai Phanalasy speaking, Natasha Shahani, Joey Boquecosa, Pat Cabrera, Jennifer Rabanes, Chief Judge Cynthia Leung, and moderator Allycia Murphy.



Panelists shown L to R: Gai Phanalasy, Natasha Shahani, Joey Boquecosa, Pat Cabrera, Jennifer Rabanes, and Chief Judge Cynthia Leung. All panelists are wearing a ti-leaf lei (traditional Hawaiian lei).