

# APEN *Voices*



**fall 2000 • volume 5, number 1**

## **Celebrating our Victories!**

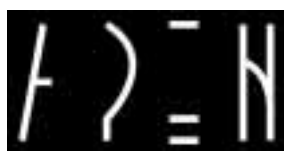
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## APEN VOICES

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# We come!

## Welcome to APEN Voices!



*With this issue we mark significant changes and growth for APEN. Within the last few months the Laotian Organizing Project has won two organizing campaigns—one which secured resources for a multilingual warning system in Richmond in response to Chevron refinery explosions, and the other which the Asian Youth Advocates led to set up a pilot advisory program for students at Richmond High School. Also, as you can see in your hands, we have a new design and look for our newsletter. And finally, as many of you know, I assumed the Executive Director role at APEN this past June, and my experience so far has been nothing short of exciting.*


*I come to APEN at a significant juncture in its growth as an organization and in its place in the environmental justice movement. APEN has played a critical role in developing a voice for Asian Pacific Islander communities in the environmental justice movement. With the Laotian Organizing Project we have brought a new and important player to the table, and our experiences have taught us valuable lessons about forging community power with youth and women in leadership. APEN is built upon the vision that direct organizing is the foundation to our work for environmental justice. Our day-to-day organizing informs our strategies and forms the basis of how we measure our success.*

*For our communities, environmental justice is about improving our overall quality of life. Essential to that is developing participatory democratic structures that allow our communities to share in the decision-making of how we govern ourselves as a society. Because we currently don't share that power, corporate polluters act with disregard to community health, enforcement agencies tend to look the other way and policy makers ignore our communities. As a result, our families become sick from the toxic facilities located where we live. Our relatives unknowingly eat contaminated fish from polluted waters. Our loved ones*

are pushed out of our neighborhoods because of increased rents and higher costs of living due to the unfettered influx of the dot-conomy and the lack of community participation in land use planning. APEN aims to reverse these trends as we advance an agenda based on healthy communities, a safe workplace, and a clean environment where we can live, play, work, learn and thrive.

My joining APEN at this time was a decision based on over 12 years of organizing experience. Over the years I've organized Filipino students on issues affirmative action, I've brought communities of color together to fight on issues of gentrification, I've led campaigns that involved hundreds of individuals and organizations on universal health care issues. Most recently I had the opportunity to direct talented organizers in California to organize low-income and working class communities of color to fight against racist and divisive statewide initiatives, and to promote community-based economic justice policies. My approach and theory of social change mirrors that which drives APEN, which is to engage in a multi-layered organizing strategy, from direct organizing to alliance-building to formulating policy that's relevant to our communities. Our strength comes from our principles and actions that directly develop the capacity of our communities to understand how power works and our commitment to build a growing group of community leaders who can craft and advance an agenda for justice.

APEN has created a framework and built a strong foundation for even more exciting work in the time ahead. We want to thank the many people who have brought APEN to this critical point, and I invite you to continue your involvement as we bring APEN to higher levels and to new arenas in our shared struggle for environmental justice. I hope you enjoy catching up on our recent endeavors in this issue of APEN Voices, and I look forward to working together in the months ahead!



Joselito Laudencia



## LOP's Members Win More Multi-lingual Health and Environmental Protections

by Pamela Chiang

In the last issue of APEN Voices we reported the success of the Laotian Organizing Project's (LOP) Campaign for Multi-lingual Warning Systems. Last year, LOP's senior members led a community effort to get the county to change the English language emergency phone system to include calls in different languages. In September 1999, the Internal Operations (IO) Committee of Contra Costa County's Supervisors agreed to LOP's demands.

Earlier this year, LOP realized that county staff were having difficulty moving forward on the Supervisors' commitment. They needed a plan and resources to carry out the work. With many languages needed in the phone alert system, the county needed to break down the daunting task into achievable parts. LOP leaders helped county staff by proposing an outreach plan and budget for a model pilot program, as well as a list of potential government and private funding sources.

**ABOVE:**  
Victorious LOP  
members gather  
after their meet-  
ing with County  
Supervisors

“We want to make sure the county fulfills its responsibility and commitment to equal protection,” said Mr. Khamphay Phahongchangh, a LOP elder, who testified before the Supervisors’ IO Committee.

After months of pressure from LOP members, on July 24, 2000, county staff and Supervisors agreed to pursue outside funding for the pilot implementation of the multi-lingual phone alert system. Potential funding sources may include penalty money from Chevron’s accident in March 1999. Staff and Supervisors also assured LOP that the county will implement the phone alert system in other languages, following the completion of the Laotian languages pilot program.

Thanks to the persistent pressure by LOP members, Contra Costa County staff and Supervisors are more informed of environmental health issues facing the county’s immigrant population, and particularly of the Laotian refugee community. In light of the disparities in health access between the Laotian population and others, the Supervisors’ IO committee also voted in a new program to increase health care access for Laotians.

County staff has begun fundraising for both the Laotian languages pilot phone alert system and the health access program. LOP is hopeful that by early next year the county will be knocking on doors and getting families enrolled in health care programs and the emergency phone alert system.

The following three articles are from three LOP elder campaign leaders. Mr. Phahongchanh and Mrs. Senenoi reflect on their experiences in the campaign. Mr. Phuthama explains some of the strategy and significance behind LOP’s 2000 campaign.



On August 4, 2000 Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) youth and elder members received an award from Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. The award acknowledges LOP's leadership in winning environmental and education improvements for all residents in Contra Costa County. Supervisor Gioia attended LOP's joint youth and elder victory celebration and presented the award before the large gathering. The following is the text of the award:

## Certificate of Congratulations to Laotian Organizing Project

The Laotian Organizing Project was established in 1995 to help empower low-income Asian and Pacific Islander communities around the social and environmental conditions in West Contra Costa County. On this day, I congratulate you as you celebrate two successful projects that have improved the quality of education and increased environmental protection in Contra Costa County. The Laotian Organizing Project has led important grassroots efforts that have resulted in the formation of a teacher advisory program at Richmond High School and the implementation of a county wide multi-lingual emergency phone alert system.

On this special day I thank you for setting an example of leadership and excellence for all in West Contra Costa County.

John Gioia, Supervisor, District 1  
Dated this 4th of August, 2000

ABOVE:  
Mr. Thongsoun  
Phuthama accepts  
award on behalf  
of LOP from  
County Supervisor  
John Gioia

# Reflections on LOP's Campaign for stories written by three LOP

## Mr. Khamphay Phahongchanh

My involvement with LOP first started when two LOP staff, Bouapha and Loun, made a presentation to my English-as-a-Second-Language class. They talked about the big explosion at the Chevron refinery and asked us if we experienced health problems because of the lack of emergency information in our languages. I was curious and interested to learn more. After that day I went to the LOP office for a community meeting. There, I saw many diverse Laotians in the meeting: young, old, and all from different Laotian tribes. After the meeting I thought about what could be done about this problem and I became more interested in LOP. I continued to attend different LOP meetings and asked many questions.

One day LOP staff asked if I wanted to go to one of the Supervisor delegation meetings. I was very nervous because I had never been to any government office or meeting. However, I thought this might be an opportunity for me to learn something. After the delegation experience, I realized how much this issue of multi-lingual warning systems was something I felt passionate and very deeply about. That's when I made my decision to be more involved and pursue this campaign with LOP and other community members.

I think that many of us in the Laotian community are still sleeping. We have not seen ourselves as important and up until now we have not seen that we can fight issues like these for ourselves. I felt that if we don't do anything now, our children and grandchildren will think we didn't do anything for our community, and that we didn't care for our community. This issue is very important. It affects the health and safety of the community. And that's why LOP campaigned to fight to resolve the English-only phone alert system, to wake up the community to be able to stand up for their rights.

Even though I am elderly, not healthy, and uneducated, my heart lies with my family, the Laotian community, and other communities. I am concerned about issues that affect us all. The challenge and struggle for me is to understand the system of democracy in this country versus the system I grew up with in Laos. They are not the same. I was not aware that the democracy in this country is one where people have to speak for themselves. The more involved I have been in LOP, the more I have learned about how democracy in this country works. My passion for justice, patience and the opportunity to learn something new after each LOP activity has helped me overcome this challenge. This is the first time in my life to be involved in anything like this work.



# Multi-lingual Warning Systems: campaign leaders

I understand things take one step at a time. It is like the steps it took to escape war. I had to leave Laos by swimming across the river to the refugee camps in Thailand. After that I arrived in the United States. Similarly, when I ride my bicycle to LOP meetings, my bicycle wheels turn one cycle at a time, and eventually I get there. As a child growing up, I always wanted to pick a mango from the tree. I had to use a ladder to climb one step at a time to finally reach the ripe mango fruit. All of these life lessons are hard, but they take patience and a willingness to learn; that's how we reach our goals. It's hard to fight something you don't know, but the most important is that which is in the heart, because we learn as we work.

I also know that as a responsible member of the LOP Campaign Planning Committee, I always take my responsibility to get the job done, to receive certain assignments from the committee and to volunteer for certain tasks to get the job done. I'm very happy that we have the Laotian Organizing Project as an organization who can guide the grassroots community, and in this case, lead us to victory in this campaign for multi-lingual phone alert system. This is a good example for many people in the community. We have lived in Richmond and San Pablo for many years, but no one has ever helped us to fight for ourselves and other communities.

As we see from this campaign victory, LOP's vision is wide and far reaching. It is a good example for other communities. They may see us and say, "Hey, we can do that too," and stand up for their rights. For me, it is important that LOP commits to fight to improve the quality of life for ALL people, by looking into problems, searching for solutions, and presenting them to whoever is responsible for implementing change. I especially value LOP's commitment to environmental justice and human rights, and that we are not a social service agency.

This campaign has hit my heart so deeply because the new changes in the county's emergency phone alert system will benefit my family, my community, and other communities and their families. I will continue to learn more and fight more with this passion, because it is the right of the people. LOP is an organization by the people, for the people.

Even though there are many challenges for me and other Laotians, as long as we put our effort and heart into the issues that affect us, we can fight and win. Three to five years from now, LOP will receive more support from the community, and will increase our membership and leadership. We will fight and win big issues that impact the community. In closing, we must be strong, brave and passionate about our fight. We know fights like these are our right, it's for the people, for the community, and to benefit our children and grandchildren to come.

## Mrs. Nouth Senenoi

My name is Nouth Senenoi. I am very happy and very proud to have been involved in the Laotian Organizing Project's campaign for multi-lingual emergency warning systems where we fought and won a big victory last year and this year.

I am one of the elder members, and also not very healthy. However, I have come to join LOP and also the Campaign Planning Committee, to fight to have the county's emergency phone alert system in many languages. In the Laotian community, we have Lao, Khmu, Mien and Hmong peoples speaking different languages. There are many other immigrant communities in this county who also need this system. Therefore, it makes me feel very good about everything I have been involved in with the LOP campaign, because the county Supervisors recently agreed to find money to set up the different languages in the phone alert system.

The most important thing that I am happy and proud of is having seen the diverse community of Laotians involved in this campaign: Lao, Mien, Khmu. I have seen the smiling faces of people involved in this effort. People have gotten involved by speaking up and carrying out the work because this issue touches their heart.

I have also had the opportunity to be involved in many delegation meetings and negotiations with county Supervisors and county staff. When I see people like Supervisor Uilkema, as a woman sitting on the Internal Operations

Committee, I think about myself also as a powerful woman. I may not be a Supervisor like her, but I am on the LOP Campaign Planning Committee and proud of what I am doing.

I feel very proud of the Laotian Organizing Project, that we have taken the lead in helping people feel really strong, passionate, and informed about how to fight for our own rights. At the same time, I feel very proud and happy to see many diverse Laotians coming together. As grassroots people, we come to learn together and work together to solve our community problems.

I have deep and compassionate feelings about this work because it produces benefits for all the people who have been affected by toxic poisoning from the big companies in our neighborhood. Our campaign addressed the people who have been affected, those who don't speak English and who are not informed of emergency information when there are big oil refinery accidents. This problem of lack of emergency information from the county in our languages really hurts the elders, who are taking care of their children and grandchildren at home.

The most important thing we learned in this campaign was that we, as a community, have the right to fight the problems and come up with solutions. We learned this because LOP has been the organization that has mentored the fundamentals to guide us in this fight. This campaign was challenging and hard. To overcome this challenge, I put effort and willingness to learn about my rights and fight for them. This campaign helped me realize that grassroots people like myself can do anything for our community. This is what LOP is about.



## Mr. Thongsoun Phuthama

This year, LOP campaigned to pressure the county to seek money for the development of the phone alert system in different languages. Last year we campaigned to get the county to commit to change the system, but they never put money to make it happen. We had to pressure the county to set up the emergency phone alert system because many immigrants live around the refineries and many do not understand English. This is the case for Laotian families, especially for the elderly who take care of their grandchildren at home everyday.

The strategy we used to pressure the county was by letting the voices of the people be heard in many different ways. One way was by sending county staff and Supervisors letters and postcards signed by residents. Another way we had our voices heard was by having delegation meetings with county staff. We also testified at the Supervisors' Internal Operations Committee meetings. In all cases, we made it clear that the phone alert system had to be set up immediately. In the various meetings with county staff and Supervisors, we also informed the county of our role in setting up different languages in the

phone alert system. We made it clear that LOP would not be the one to implement the new languages, because they wanted us to do the work. We made it clear that it is the county government's responsibility to serve and protect the people. Our job is to research the solution and present them with a proposed plan on how to set up the different languages in the phone alert system. In the end, the Supervisors adopted our plan and agreed to find money to make it happen.

The most important thing about this victory is that both the county and the community acknowledged LOP's work on this issue. This is the first victory for the Laotian community, in this county and possibly in the nation. This is the first time that I have seen Laotians represent themselves in this country and receive a big victory. Furthermore, this environmental justice victory is important because it is not only beneficial for Laotians, but for other immigrant communities as well.



I see LOP in the next three to five years as an organization that will continue to lead the Laotian community. Ultimately time will tell the answer. But, many people in the Laotian community have seen the work of LOP, how we are able to combat the problems by developing concrete solutions, and getting them established in the government. Just look, the youth have won a new teacher advisory program at their high school and have made the quality of education better. The seniors and

adults have won a multi-lingual phone alert system in the county and have made the quality of environmental health protection better. The people in the community see that this organization is by the people and for the people, and that we work on issues that benefit society as a whole. When more people in the community understand all of what LOP is about, we will see an increase in the membership, an increase in grassroots community leadership, and bigger campaign victories.

# LOP's Multi-lingual Warning System Campaign

## Timeline of Key Events

**March 25, 1999** a huge explosion at the Richmond, CA Chevron oil refinery where dangerous chemicals are spewed into the air. Nearby residents were not effectively informed of emergency procedures by the county, especially limited English speaking households. People experienced nausea, rashes and respiratory complications from exposure to the toxic chemicals. LOP contacts Laotian residents about the emergency procedures; families want to organize to correct the problem of lack of multi-lingual information.

**April 1999** LOP organizes Laotian house meetings and neighborhood meetings to identify a solution to the lack of environmental health protection in the county. Families join LOP and begin campaigning for a multi-lingual emergency phone alert system from Contra Costa County. Accountability meetings with County staff begin, postcard drive launched, and media interest in the issue is heightened.

**September 27, 1999 LOP VICTORY!** After months of pressure from Laotian residents, Supervisors on the Internal Operations Committee commit to change the county's English-only emergency phone alert system to include multiple languages.

**Early 2000** LOP learns that the county is slow in implementing the new multi-lingual emergency phone alert system. LOP begins a second campaign to pressure the county to commit resources to implement the system. LOP develops a model pilot program for the county to reach the Laotian community and enroll households into the new emergency phone alert system. LOP also identifies potential outside funding sources for this work.

**July 24, 2000 LOP VICTORY!** Members and leaders pack a Supervisors' Internal Operations Committee meeting and win new environmental and health improvements. The Supervisors' Committee agrees to LOP's demands to: (1) secure outside funding sources for the implementation of the Laotian languages pilot program (with the commitment to set up other languages after the pilot), (2) investigate the potential of Chevron penalty money from the March 1999 explosion towards the set up of the multi-lingual phone alert system, and (3) launch a new program to help Laotian families get access to low-cost health care programs.

# Building Unity on a Foundation of Mutual Respect

As we gear up for the 10th Anniversary of the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, it marks an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the progress of building multi-racial unity in the environmental and environmental justice movements.

We can generally say that there has been progress in coalition building between people of color and white communities ranging from site-specific fights against corporate polluters to the phase out of a class of harmful chemicals such as dioxin. The cases of multi-racial solidarity and unity are many. However, unity and solidarity are not automatic, but earned over time, built on a foundation of mutual respect.

This past August 2000, at the International People's Dioxin Action Summit (held in Berkeley, California), Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) leaders and staff were confronted by disrespectful and racist behavior by a few individuals attending the conference. The summit workshops and plenary

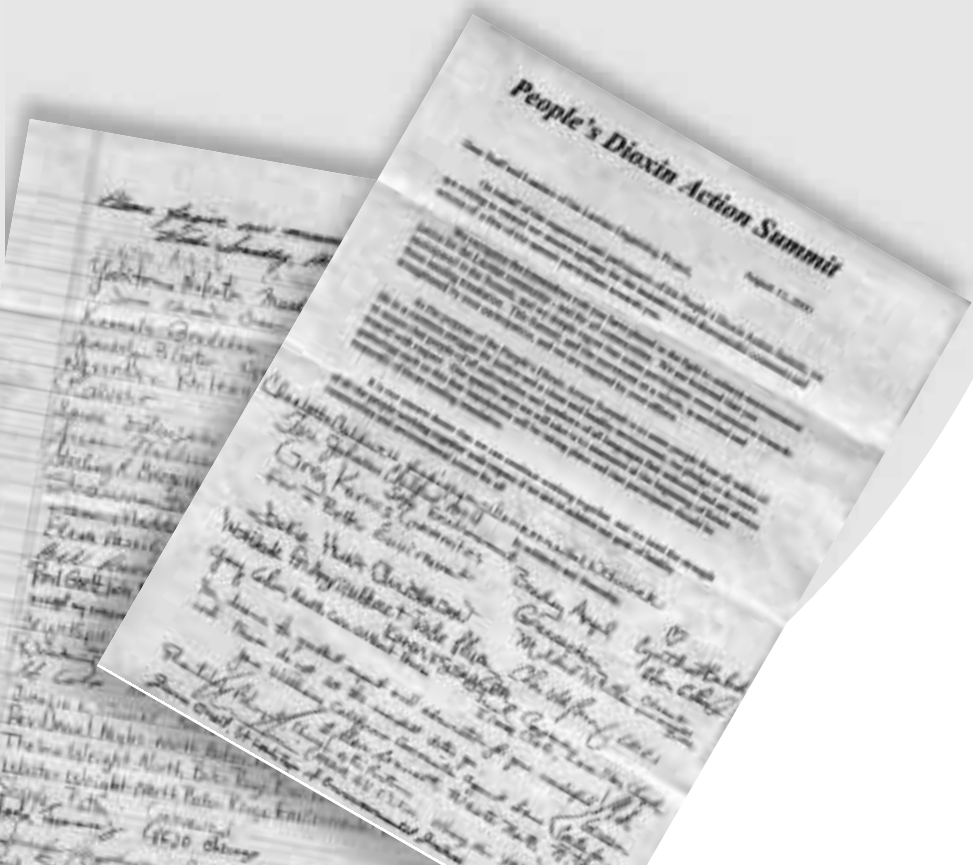
ABOVE:  
LOP organizer  
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translates for mem-  
bers at the Dioxin  
Summit



sessions were conducted in English, and LOP staff had to provide Lao translation for our two attending leaders. On many occasions LOP staff and leaders were given sneers and jeers by a few summit participants, who looked down upon us because we were communicating in a language other than English. Even after we explained before workshop sessions that we would be translating in the corner of the room, we were given offensive remarks. These people made LOP staff and leaders feel dumbed-down, and discredited our ownership of and leadership in the environmental justice movement. Even though LOP's leaders felt the summit was important, they did not feel welcome and did not return the next day.

We presented our concerns to the conference coordinators immediately and they gave us the space to share this problem before the 400 person participating body. We were pleased to see that overall, people were supportive of our concerns and were angry that the incidents had occurred. We made it clear that the responsibility of holding racist and disrespectful behavior accountable does not lie solely on the victims, but on everyone.

This lesson reminds us that the struggle for racial justice still applies to the inner workings of the diverse environmental and environmental justice movements. The following is a letter of apology written and signed by the conference attendees to LOP leaders and staff.





# AYA Victory at Richmond High School

by Bouapha Toommaly

On May 25, 2000, over 40 Laotian, Latino and African American students, teachers and parents packed the School Site Council (SSC) meeting at Richmond High with signs, enthusiasm and a strong united front to demand approval for a pilot advisory program. Asian Youth Advocates (AYA), the youth component of the Laotian Organizing Project (LOP), led the alliance of student groups and supporters to speak out and urge council members to vote “yes” on advisory. The organized front of students, teachers and parents was powerful; the SSC voted to approve a pilot advisory for the following school year.

Richmond High School, comprised of 95% students of color, lacks sufficient support and guidance for students to succeed. Having only two counselors for over 1,600 students means that students do not receive the basic level of guidance to achieve their goals to graduate or go on to college. Students often feel lost and detached from school, resulting in poor attendance and poor academic performance. One ninth grader explains, “When I first came here to school, I didn’t know who to go to for help. I felt like I was floating around. I support advisory because it would help make people feel more wanted at this school.”

Based on analysis and research, AYA youth leaders decided that an advisory program would be the most valuable and feasible solution to the lack of counseling resources for students at Richmond High. An advisory program would give every student at least one adult to go to for help or with questions by placing a small number of students with a teacher-advisor to guide students through school. AYA talked to hundreds of students about the issue, collected over 500 postcards in support, and organized the coordinated effort to win a program to improve guidance for students at Richmond High School.

**ABOVE:**  
AYA members and  
allies celebrate  
their victory at the  
SSC meeting last  
May

# In their own words

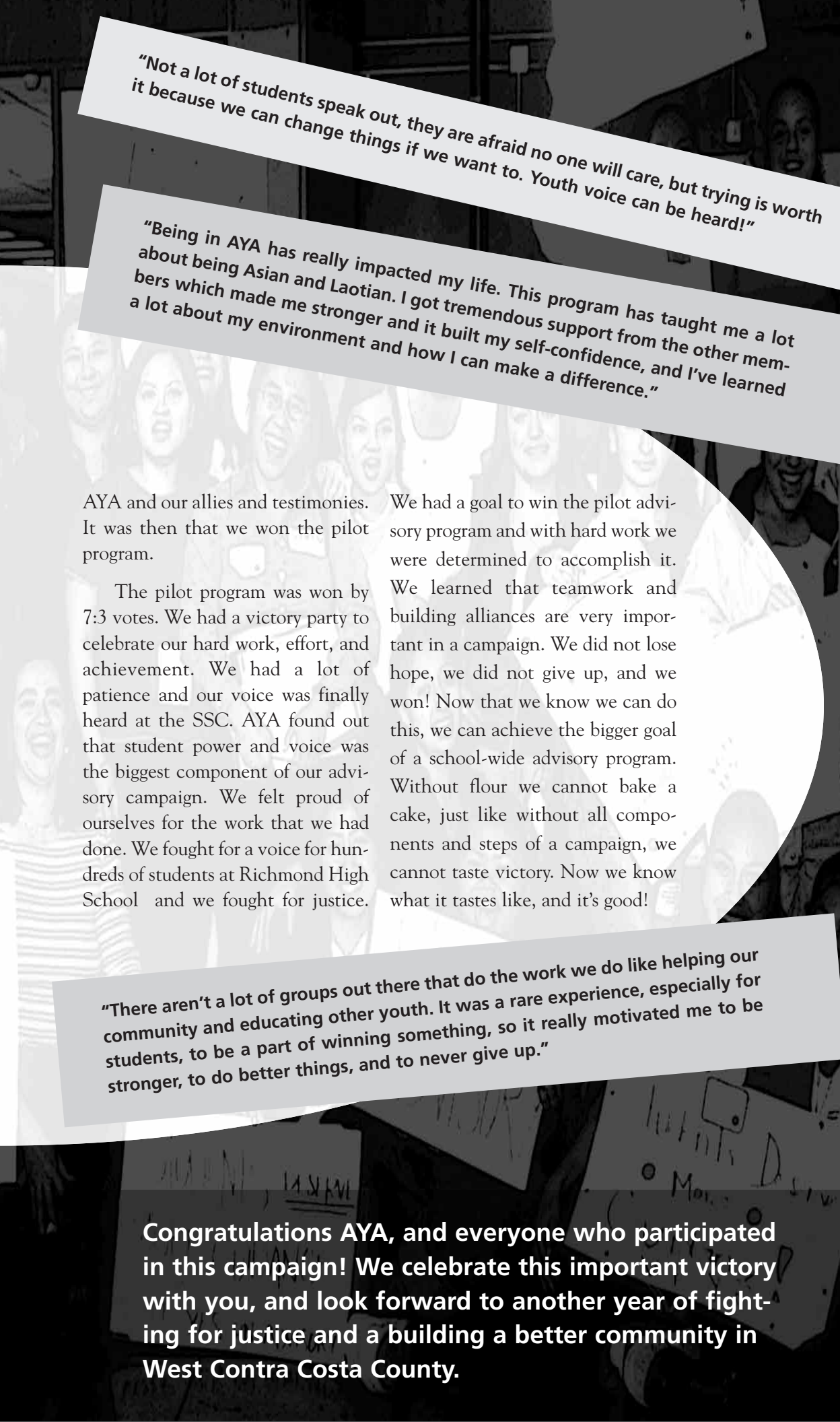
"I want to change Richmond High to make and build a stronger community. I've heard a lot of bad things about RHS, the main school in our area. It's close to all of us so if we don't end up going there, someone we know will. I thought about my brother and my little sister and it occurred to me that if I didn't act now, they wouldn't have a good education at RHS. In the end even if it's not a change for me, it's still a change for someone I know or care about."

To get to where we are today we planned during the summer of '99 about what we were going to do in the fall. We learned about campaigns, and we prepared ourselves. When fall came along AYA decided on an advisory program as our solution. We did a lot of surveys and we thought a school-wide advisory program would be the best way. So, AYA gave a presentation and we built allies with Healthy Start, Leadership, and Youth Together. Although some AYA girls had jobs to take care of and school to attend we struggled real hard to make everything go right.

At first we thought we could win anything, but it grew harder to win the advisory program when we were losing touch with some AYA girls. But as spring came and the SSC (School Site Council) meeting drew near, AYA really pulled together and took action. We set up joint student meetings, delegations, and gave breath-taking presentations.

When the day of the SSC meeting came, it was the most uptight day for the AYA crew. We pulled everyone from AYA together and marched in the room along with our allies. Students from both

"The most important thing I learned working on this campaign is how to work together. It was hard working together because everyone has their own personal lives. The only time we had together was when we met with APEN and some of the girls didn't always show up. It was hard to work on something as a group, but I learned that together, youth can achieve anything!"



*"Not a lot of students speak out, they are afraid no one will care, but trying is worth it because we can change things if we want to. Youth voice can be heard!"*

*"Being in AYA has really impacted my life. This program has taught me a lot about being Asian and Laotian. I got tremendous support from the other members which made me stronger and it built my self-confidence, and I've learned a lot about my environment and how I can make a difference."*

AYA and our allies and testimonies. It was then that we won the pilot program.

The pilot program was won by 7:3 votes. We had a victory party to celebrate our hard work, effort, and achievement. We had a lot of patience and our voice was finally heard at the SSC. AYA found out that student power and voice was the biggest component of our advisory campaign. We felt proud of ourselves for the work that we had done. We fought for a voice for hundreds of students at Richmond High School and we fought for justice.

We had a goal to win the pilot advisory program and with hard work we were determined to accomplish it. We learned that teamwork and building alliances are very important in a campaign. We did not lose hope, we did not give up, and we won! Now that we know we can do this, we can achieve the bigger goal of a school-wide advisory program. Without flour we cannot bake a cake, just like without all components and steps of a campaign, we cannot taste victory. Now we know what it tastes like, and it's good!

*"There aren't a lot of groups out there that do the work we do like helping our community and educating other youth. It was a rare experience, especially for students, to be a part of winning something, so it really motivated me to be stronger, to do better things, and to never give up."*

**Congratulations AYA, and everyone who participated in this campaign! We celebrate this important victory with you, and look forward to another year of fighting for justice and a building a better community in West Contra Costa County.**

# Congratulations and good luck ...but not good-bye!

On July 19, 2000, friends, supporters, staff, and AYA youth members of LOP & APEN honored our latest group of 'graduates', Gloria Chaleunsky, Mey Liam Saechao, and Muey Khurn Saechao, from Asian Youth Advocates. They have been actively involved in all aspects of AYA for the past four years and have developed not only their own potential as leaders, but became role-models for the younger members. To acknowledge their contributions and commitment the three young leaders were awarded scholarships to use toward their ongoing education.



All three young women continue to move and grow and contribute in different ways. This summer, Gloria and Mey Liam staffed our youth summer program, while Muey Khurn, although working full-time, assisted with the adult and senior organizing. They all plan on attending college this fall. Mey Liam will attend San Francisco State University and both Gloria and Muey Khurn will attend Contra Costa Community College.



We believe that this does not mark the end of their involvement with LOP, but rather the beginning of a new phase of their participation to strengthen LOP and work for justice in their community. Below is an excerpt from a speech by Gloria, which captures the spirit and commitment these young women represent:

"I am a Laotian American girl, whose native tongue and content cannot stop me from getting what I want. And what I want is justice in my community. Being in AYA has allowed me to work with others to get justice for all of us, and also to accomplish my goals. I am a leader and a role model...I appreciate AYA so much and wish that other teens were as lucky as myself to experience this extraordinary and unique group... I am proud. I am Asian. I am strong. I am intelligent. I am an Asian Youth Advocate, and because we are all somebody, I am somebody."

Congratulations Muey Khurn, Gloria, and Mey Liam! We are so proud of your accomplishments and so grateful for your dedication to LOP and your community.



# National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit II

October 24, 2001 will mark the 10th anniversary of the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. That historic event signified the coming together of hundreds of grassroots struggles from across the country and around the world. Those who came learned of each other's struggles and worked tirelessly to articulate the demands of their issues into the Principles of Environmental Justice. A call to action from the Summit saw grassroots organizations, academics, researchers and others initiate and engage in numerous short and long-term coalitions for environmental justice. These include collaborative work on direct action campaigns, educational conferences, community-based research, training programs, policy work, and fundraising. Finally, coming out of Summit I, 600 participants carried home the mission to build the capacity for communities of color to "Speak for Ourselves." Leadership development and self-determination became the key focal point for how future work would unfold and succeed. One example is the formation of APEN in 1993.

Now as we approach the 10th anniversary it is time to document the achievements, identify the challenges, set backs, lessons and chart future direction. One huge difference between Summit I and Summit II will be the participation of leaders from Asian communities from across the country. While Summit I saw only a handful of Asian leaders and organizations in attendance, Summit II will be very different! APEN and other Asian organizations are going to play an active role in planning of Summit II. Participation in the upcoming planning will include Pam Tau Lee (APEN), Pen Loh (Alternatives for Community & Environment), Xuan Nguyen-Sutter (National Network of Refugee Women), and Bouapha Toommaly (APEN-Asian Youth Advocates).

In the upcoming issues of the APEN newsletter, we will keep our readers informed on how people can get involved in Summit II. Stay tuned for more to come.

# Welcome to APEN's new Executive Director...

So, who is Joselito Laudencia? At the welcome gathering for APEN's new Executive Director, Board member Pam Tau Lee posed this question to our APEN staff, board, allies, friends, and family.



In the past two months, we at APEN have begun to really know Joselito as he has transitioned into the role as APEN's Executive Director. We have come to know his deep commitment to issues of justice, his sense of humor, and his commitment to the environmental justice movement (and of course, his love for Peets coffee!) We've witnessed how he has harnessed his experience, skills, and commitment together and focused on growing and deepening APEN's direct organizing work and building an organization that can contribute and take leadership in a movement for justice. We've have come to know Joselito as a thoughtful and focused leader who continues to challenge us to think critically and proactively about how to expand and deepen our work. We know that he is quick to learn names, affiliations, histories and a multitude of acronyms. We know that he's shown boundless enthusiasm, patience, and commitment during this intensive transition to take the lead of our organization.

It is an exciting time for APEN. Joselito's new leadership along with recent successful campaigns, reflect the growing leadership of the Laotian community to create positive social change in their communities. These campaigns illustrate the power of direct organizing and leadership in our API communities, and through this work the Board and staff of APEN are working towards growing a movement for environmental justice. We hope you will join us in that effort.



# APEN Happenings

## Thank you!

How can we ever put into words our appreciation for Peggy Saika, who left her role as founding director of APEN last June. For her six years with APEN, Peggy has been a visionary, a strategist, a builder, a mentor, a sister, even a van driver. Peggy, for your dedication, for the countless hours on conference calls, for feeding us during endless meetings, for making APEN feel like a family. You are a true compañera and we thank you!

APEN would also like to thank the Indigo Girls and KFOG for doing a benefit concert that raised over \$7,000 to support APEN's work in the community. We especially owe heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Nilak Butler of the Indigenous Womens Network for making the concert possible.



## APEN Staff

After seeing the Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) through its first ever campaign and victory, Pamela Chiang, APEN staff member since 1996, was granted a well-deserved break at Windcall, the retreat center of the Common Counsel Foundation.

APEN said goodbye to two dedicated staff members, Yung Ouyang and Loun Saechao. Yung, who has been the backbone of APEN's research and mapping projects has moved on to Oakland based Urban Strategies Council. Loun, who has played an essential role in organizing the Mien-speaking members of the Laotian community as part of the LOP team also moved on. Thank you Yung and Loun for all your hard work, you are both sorely missed.

We are very lucky to have Mary Chaleunsky, one of the founding members of the Asian Youth Advocates of LOP, join the LOP staff as Administrative Associate.

Taking a break from her Masters program at UCLA, Maria Kong was awarded a fellowship from the Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) to complete a documentation project for LOP.

LOP staff member Bouapha Toommaly was honored with a Refugee Awareness Award for her dedication and commitment to the Laotian community.

APEN welcomed its newest member, Aiko Unita Kennedy Yoshitani, into our ranks last November 12, 1999—daughter of APEN staff member Miya Yoshitani and her partner Danny Kennedy.

## APEN Board

APEN welcomed new Board member David Kakishiba, long-time organizer and director of the East Bay Asian Youth Center.

We also said farewell to Rajiv Bhatia, Board member since 1996

Francis Calpotura was honored with the prestigious Bannerman Fellowship for activists of color, for over 15 years of tireless work fighting for social and economic justice.

Yin Ling Leung has relocated to Issaquah, WA with her daughter Maya and partner Shaibal Roy. She remains active with the APEN board and with Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (APIRH), but she is sorely missed.

Pam Tau Lee and Peggy Saika were both honored by the Exploratorium Museum in San Francisco.

APEN was honored for its environmental justice work in the API community by the southern social justice organization, Grassroots Leadership, at their 20th Anniversary event on September 24th.

# Support us

APEN needs your support! We are only able to carry out our work with the support of individuals like yourself. Aside from making a cash donation, there are many different ways to support us...

**Donate stock or make a planned gift.** We accept stock donations as another convenient way to contribute to APEN and get a tax deduction. You can also designate APEN as a beneficiary in your will. Call us at 510/834-8920 ext. \*815 if you have questions.

**Volunteer.** We need help from people with specific skills and interests like: computer and network maintenance, special events planning, web page design & maintenance, graphic design, photography, videography, administrative tasks... Let us know how you might be able to contribute your special skills!

**Donate a used vehicle.** You've heard the commercials... you get rid of your old car, boat or RV; you get a tax deduction for the value of the vehicle, and APEN gets a monetary contribution!

**Make an in-kind donation.** The value of the item you donate is tax deductible. Our wish list:

Laptop PC computers

Camera(s)

Digital camera

High-8 video camera

VCR

Film & video tapes

Radio w/tape deck

Office supplies

**Give at the office.** APEN is part of a consortium of national environmental justice networks, the Environmental Justice Fund, which was created to develop resources and collaborate strategically to further the principles and work of the environmental justice movement. The Environmental Justice Fund is part of the Combined Federal Campaign this year. If you are a federal employee, you can designate the Environmental Justice Fund on your pledge card with code number 0925. If your workplace is a part of another workplace giving campaign like United Way or the California State Employees Campaign, you can write APEN or the Environmental Justice Fund in the "Donor Option" section of the card, or ask your office coordinator for the "Option Card."

**Get your office to give.** Check to see if your workplace has a matching gifts program. Your gift to APEN could be doubled or tripled through a matching gifts program. If your workplace does not have this type of philanthropic program, encourage them to initiate one!

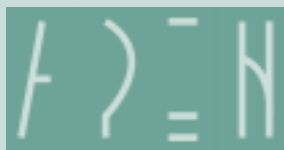
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Asian Pacific  
Environmental Network

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## **Mission Statement**

All people have a right to a clean and healthy environment in which their communities can live, work, learn, play and thrive. Towards this vision, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network was founded in 1993 to bring together a collective voice among the diverse and unique histories and cultures of native-born, immigrant, and refugee Asian and Pacific Islander communities in the United States. Through a strategy which combines grassroots community organizing, building a network among our communities and collaborating with other environmental justice networks, APEN works to strengthen the capacity of our communities to protect and shape our environments through democratic participation. APEN is part of a broad, multi-racial movement for environmental, social and economic justice.