

# APEN

# Voices

Asian Pacific Environmental Network  
Volume 1, Issue 3, September 2002

## FIGHTING FOR HOUSING ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT

With the growing momentum of Power in Asians Organizing (PAO), the community residents' concern about the housing crisis and the upcoming November 2002 elections, APEN is promoting two ballot measures aimed at creating and improving fair and affordable housing in Oakland and the state of California. The two important housing initiatives are Proposition EE, the Just cause initia-

tive, and Proposition 46, the Housing and Emergency Shelter Trust Fund.

The Just Cause initiative, or Proposition EE, is a measure that will put in place basic protections for renters against unfair evictions. If Proposition EE passes, it will require landlords to have a "just cause" in order to evict tenants. Currently, Oakland has a "no-cause" eviction policy. For example, even if a tenant

has been a good tenant and pays rent on time, a landlord can still issue a 30-day eviction notice without valid reason. Just Cause is a basic protection for renters that has already been adopted by many cities in the Bay Area, including San Francisco, Hayward and Berkeley. It is time that Oakland joins its neighboring cities in improving tenants' rights.

Proposition 46, the Housing & Emergency Shelter Trust Fund is a \$2.1 billion state housing bond. If Proposition 46 passes, there are numerous benefits for Californians.

*(continued inside)*

## GROWING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

By Sandy Saeturn & Mari Rose Taruc

This year's Asian Youth Advocates summer program was filled with politics, support and fun! Starting in June through August, the girls met for peer support circles, studied community struggles in their political education sessions, and traveled to fun activities for team-building.

The peer support circles are run by the AYA girls, a licensed therapist and an APEN staffperson. It creates a space for the girls to not only to express themselves, but a chance to listen, give support and practice giving advice. The girls have felt strongly about having this experience because it helps them build deeper



AYA members interviewed at the Satjadham conference

relationships with each other, their families and community.

To expand their political consciousness, we looked into three commu-

nities for our political education sessions. The girls' first destination was to their own Laotian community, to

the Satjadham ("Literature for Justice") conference. This annual conference was held in Richmond, CA this year to bring voices of different ages together, as well as learn more about different Laotian communities throughout the country. Then we headed over to the Eastlake Festival in east Oakland to help our sister project PAO with surveying community folks about their housing concerns. For our 3rd session, our young AIWA (Asian Immigrant Women Advocates) sisters gave us an actual tour of a sweatshop in Oakland Chinatown. Their presentation and the skits we acted out together about the unfair and unsafe working conditions behind designer

*(continued on next page)*



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### Mission

All people have a right to a clean and healthy environment in which their communities can live, work, learn, play and thrive. Toward this vision, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network was founded to bring together a collective voice among the diverse API communities in the United States to develop an alternative agenda for environmental, social and economic justice. Through building an organized movement of grassroots people, we strive to bring fundamental changes to institutions that will prioritize public good over profit and to promote the right of every person to a decent, safe, affordable quality of life, in which we participate in collectively made decisions affecting our lives.

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### AYA (continued from front page)



Stacy of AIWA in skit

What better way to build teamwork than to try to get around a big lake, paddle-boat-ing in Lake Chabot in San Leandro? Maybe it's dodging Bay Bridge traffic to get to a youth theatre performance in San Francisco? Or keeping each other warm through the gushing bay winds riding the ferry to Pier 39? Or maybe it's being brave together to ride all the monster rides like Medusa at Six Flags Marine

fashion labels really made us think differently about our shopping choices. Wow, so much to learn about ourselves and others!

World, Vallejo? We think it's all of it. These fun activities helped the girls value each other's presence and contributions to the team, no matter where they were. It was an also opportunity to get out of Richmond and see other places.

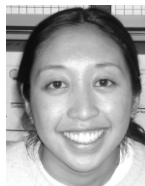
So this summer is over, but the girls will continue to do build AYA throughout the year. AYA is currently gearing up and preparing for the EJ Summit in October in D.C. with



AYA's Seangthip in skit

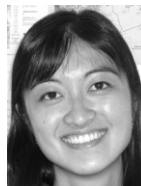
other youth groups in the Bay Area. So if you want to enjoy these activities with us, we always welcome volunteers—so just give us a call. We know you'll have a blast!

## WELCOME OUR NEW STAFF!



#### Lisa De Castro, Development Assistant

In 1996, Lisa moved to California from New Jersey after earning her BA in Math and Economics from Boston College. She spent one year providing emergency services to the homeless population of Sacramento at an outdoor homeless shelter. And in the past 4 years, Lisa worked as an environmental consultant, performing emergency response investigations and assessments at various hazardous materials sites on the West Coast and Pacific Islands. She comes to APEN with much enthusiasm and the desire to learn as much as possible about the development field!



#### Jenny Lin, Research Associate

Jenny joins us from L.A., and has been involved in organizing and research around education, housing, and labor since 1998. From 1998-2000 Jennifer served as the Project Director of the Student of Color Campus Diversity Project of the U.S. Student Association, a national student organization dedicated to expanding educational access. After USSA, Jennifer received her Masters in Public Policy from the UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research. While at UCLA, Jennifer conducted research and worked for organizations including the Los Angeles Garment Workers Center and Venice Community Housing Corporation.

Make a contribution to APEN and support API communities fighting for positive change! Call us at 510.834.8920 for more information on any of these giving opportunities.

### **Join APEN's Circle of Fire Monthly Donor Program**

Let us do all the work! Once a month, we debit your credit card securely through [egrants.org](http://egrants.org) and your reliable monthly donation supports our on-going work. Your gift is immediately put towards APEN's programs.

### **Make an on-line donation**

Visit [www.apen4ej.org](http://www.apen4ej.org) and click the DonateNow! button. All on-line donations are made secure through [egrants.org](http://egrants.org).

### **Give at the office**

If your workplace is part of a campaign like the United Way or the California State Employees Campaign, you can write APEN, tax i.d. #94-3261846 in the "Donor Option" section of the card, or ask your office administrator for the "Option Card."

### **Have your office give**

If your organization or corporation has a matching gifts program, you could double or triple your gift to APEN.

### **Donate stock**

Stock not doing well? Give it to APEN and get a big tax break at the same time.

### **Send us your unused BART tickets**

5 or 10 cents left over on your BART ticket? Mail them to APEN! We need to reach our goal of 500 tickets!

### **Volunteer your time**

We appreciate your help with mailings, hosting a house party, providing childcare at events, driving members to and from meetings, and other office tasks.

## **LOP WINS LEADERSHIP AWARD**

We are proud to announce that APEN's Laotian Organizing Project organizing staff team, Grace Kong, Torm Nompraseurt and May Phan, are 2002 Leadership for a Changing World Awardees! Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 20 leaders and leadership teams who represent social change efforts in local communities across the country.

LOP is honored to receive this prestigious award, and sees our involvement over the next two years as a way to connect and share lessons we've learned through our organizing work with the other groups, and to bring national attention to the issues facing low-income Asian immigrant and refugee communities.

Leadership for a Changing World is a program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University. We want to thank all those who participated in the nomination and site visit process: Peggy Saika, Pam Tau Lee, Michael Kent, Karen Susag, Henry Clark, John Dalrymple, Supervisor John Gioia, Terrance Cheung, Chris Karnsouvong, Pastor Oun Khamvanhthong, Phaeng Toom-maly, Pratap Chatterjee, LOP's Campaign Planning Committee, Asian Youth Advocates representatives, APEN staff, and especially Sandy Saetern, LOP's General Support Associate, without whom none of our work would be possible!

## ***Housing initiatives***

*(continued from front page)*

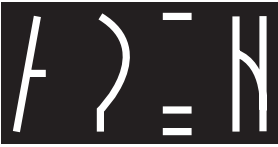
Low-income seniors, disabled persons, and families with children would receive \$910 million for rental housing. \$495 million would be set aside for homeownership programs, including sweat equity housing, where homebuyers volunteer their own labor to help build their homes to lower the purchase price, and down payment assistance for low and moderate-income families. Emergency shelters and permanent housing with support services for homeless seniors, battered women, the mentally ill and veterans would be given \$390 million. Farm worker housing, both rental and ownership, would be granted \$200 million. Another \$100 million would create incentives for local governments to approve housing developments. Finally, \$5 million would be reserved for local code enforcement to revitalize neighborhoods. Proposition 46 is a bond that will be paid for from existing funds in the state general fund and no new taxes would need to be created. Proposition

46 is an important step in improving the lives of Californians in need of affordable housing.

The housing crisis in California affects all of us and we have the power to positively impact the California's housing situation. The issues of housing affordability and tenants' rights are critical to improving the lives of the many API community members in Oakland and throughout California. Please pledge your support to PAO and join us by voting yes on Proposition EE and Proposition 46!

## **Thanks to our Stellar Volunteers!**

Mary Chaleunsky  
Mimi Ho  
Jocelyn Hsu  
Mai Kai Lee  
Innosanto Nagara  
Erin Ninh  
Kelly Saetern  
Muey Saetern



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Thank you for your support in 2002!

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The California Endowment  
The California Wellness Foundation  
"The Community Environmental Health Resource Center, a project of the Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning"  
US EPA - Environmental Justice Small Grants Program  
Vanguard Public Foundation  
VanLobensels/Rembeck Foundation  
Walter S Johnson Foundation  
Women's Foundation - Sisterhood Fund  
Zellerbach Family Foundation
- We apologize for any accidental omissions to this list.





# Housing is a Key Environmental Justice Issue!

By Joselito Laudencia, Executive Director

When APEN's organizing projects in the Bay Area communities of Richmond and Oakland asked community members what issue currently concerned them most, housing emerged at the top of the list. It's no surprise. Over the last few years in the SF Bay Area, rents have skyrocketed, buying a home is out of the reach of the vast majority of local residents, and toxic mold in the home has become both a local and national headline. As APEN embarks on a regional campaign to tackle housing issues in low-income Asian Pacific Islander communities, the question has emerged: How is housing an environmental justice issue?

While environmental issues have been largely associated with conservation, wildlife protection and open space, environmental justice emerged to expand the notion that our environments were more than the "natural" environments that surround us. Environmental justice interconnects the seemingly separate issues we face and asserts that our environment includes "where we live, work, play, learn and pray." Environmental justice prioritized people as an important piece of the environment that need protection as well and, importantly, recognized poor communities of color as bearing a large and disproportionate share of problems.

Housing issues are nothing new to communities of color. Segregated neighborhoods, housing discrimination, redlining practices of banks that deny loans to particular communities, substandard housing and community displacement are some of the many issues people of color have historically faced in the United States. However, over the past few years, numerous environmental justice groups have



Overcrowded homes

taken on the charge of housing as a key environmental justice issue and have identified underlying root causes to these problems that expose the link between housing and traditional EJ issues such as toxic dumping in our communities.

## Imbalance of power relations

The displacement of communities and the tenuous relationship between landlords and low-income tenants (who in many cases have few protections) reflect the often powerless situ-

ation of tenants, poor people and people of color. Over the last two years, community members of the Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) were unjustly evicted so that their landlords could raise the rents on their properties. This lack of power, especially in immigrant and refugee communities, often is at the heart of why corporations pollute our environments and why regulatory agencies turn their heads away. Organizing community power is a key strategy to the EJ movement to challenge these conditions.

## Environmental health

Neighborhoods and homes located next to polluting facilities like Richmond's Chevron oil refinery or Oakland's Red Star Yeast factory have long been the source of environmental justice struggles. In most cases, families in these communities experience higher rates of asthma, reproductive problems and cancer. Within the home itself, lead in paint chips and asbestos in insulation have caused developmental disorders in children. Most recently, mold in homes causing

Nita Sisamouth

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chronic health problems has received increased public attention. As part of a photo project that documented housing issues, one member of our Asian Youth Advocates took a picture of mold on the wall next to her bed. After painting it over and over, the mold would eventually reappear with ongoing neglect by her landlord.

### **Land use and zoning issues**

Gentrification in neighborhoods where poor communities of color reside have resulted in the displacement of long-standing residents and have broken generations of community ties. The appearance of Starbucks in New York's Harlem or dance clubs that bring residents from all over the SF Bay Area into San Francisco's primarily Latino Mission district have signaled larger efforts to change the character of neighborhoods. In most cases, rent and home prices have risen, causing long-time residents to move to outside areas. At the heart of this are land-use policies that do not support and safeguard

affordable housing, as well as other decisions and policies that do not involve residents in community planning. One key environmental justice principle is that communities must "speak for ourselves" and that communities most impacted by problems need to be in the decision-making leadership.

### **Related environmental justice implications**

Housing issues are intricately connected to and compound other EJ community issues. For example, in 1998, APEN conducted a seafood consumption survey that warned Laotian community residents of the dangers of subsistence fishing from the polluted Bay Area waters. In the past two years, residents have turned back to subsistence fishing to supplement their income, having to spend oftentimes over half of their income on housing. Homes are overcrowded with multiple family members who have no other place to live, and fishing is one of the few ways to eat and

survive. Another example is the creation of zoning policies and the lack of coordinated urban planning policies that results in available jobs that are very far from where people can afford to live. Because the SF Bay Area does not have a comprehensive, affordable regional transportation system, many are forced to drive long distances, increasing traffic congestion and auto pollution.

With over 1 million new people expected in the Bay Area by the year 2020, housing issues will continue to tear away at the fabric and quality of life in our communities. Although the dot-com bust has shown some signs of relief in the housing crunch, the overall trend continues against the health and well-being of sustainable communities. We at APEN will keep you posted on our important work and the work of our allies on this environmental justice issue when we launch our housing campaign in early 2003!

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