

Celebrating Diversity: IACF Unity Dinner

Chinese, Filipino, Hispanic and Vietnamese community groups joined local city officials to celebrate the sixth annual Unity Dinner hosted by the Indo-American Community Federation in Fremont Calif. A **Siliconeer** report.

(Left):



California Lieut. Gov. John Garamendi delivering the keynote speech at the sixth annual Unity Dinner.

This year GOPIO-San Francisco Bay Area joined hands with Indo-American Community Federation to host the annual Unity Dinner at the Hilton Newark/Fremont March 23.

The keynote speaker was Calif. Lieut. Gov. John Garamendi.

The dinner was originally set for January to coincide with the birthday celebration of civil rights leader Martin Luther King. However, since Fremont was celebrating its 50th anniversary, the event was re-scheduled for March 24, 2006. It returned to a March date in 2007, organizer said, to avoid any conflict with other Indo-American organizations holding Republic day celebration in January.

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY IACF UNITY DINNER

This sold-out sixth annual event was presented by Indo-American Community Federation and was sponsored by a host of Indian American and mainstream organizations including Chinese, Hispanic, Filipino and Vietnamese organizations. The event was conceived by Jeevan Zutshi, the founder chairman of Indo-American Community Federation as well as the president of GOPIO-San Francisco Bay Area chapter, after 9/11 to celebrate and promote unity amongst diverse groups in California.

"After 9/11, I saw a need for an event like this which can bring diverse public officials together with diverse community leadership," said Zutshi. "It gives the community an opportunity to understand different cultures, come closer and also meet their elected representatives in a social setting."

(Right): CMA president Anmol Mahal, MD



"We need to look at things that are happening in our backyard," Zutshi added. He stressed the need for Indians to be more involved in issues like homelessness, hospitals and schools that need community cooperation. "Holding Unity Dinners is a way of reminding us that we need to be involved in this community," he said.

"The Unity Dinner was a demonstration of unity of the human spirit in coming together and sharing histories and experiences," Garamendi said. Honda, a third generation Japanese American, spoke about the ultimate need for understanding one another.

Other organization sponsors included the National Federation of Indian American organizations, FIA, American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, Citizens for Better Community, Fremont Chamber of Commerce, Fremont Education Foundation, Ohlone College Foundation, Citizens for Better Community, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Alameda County, and the Hispanic Community Affairs Council.

A slew of public officials attended, including state Sen. Ellen Corbett, state assembly members Alberto Torrico and Mary Hayashi; Alameda county supervisors, mayors of Fremont, Union City, Newark, Milpitas and Hayward, council members and elected and appointed board members from local governments.

(Right): A Chinese martial arts performer

"The purpose of the event is to bring public officials together with the diverse community leadership," said IACF founder Jeevan Zutshi, who stressed the need for all citizens to get involved in bringing the community together.



Several honorees were recognized up by the awards and recognition committee.

Dr. Anmol Mahal, president of the California Medical Association, was chosen for the leadership in medicine award.

Ohlone Community College trustee and Chinese American community leader Garrett Yee was honored as the Citizen of the Year. Yee is a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve who recently returned from Iraq.

Other speakers included Ohlone College president Doug Treadway. Newark Unified School District trustee Nina Moore who talked about creating a hate-free community.

The event was enlivened by performances of Chinese folk dancers, Chinese martial arts, Mexican folk ballet, classical Indian dancers and Bhangra – with the Chinese participants in particular presenting a riveting performance.

The first Unity Dinner was held in January 2002 and has since attracted several public officials each year.