

CELEBRATING AAPI PHILANTHROPY

BUILDING A MILWAUKEE FOR ALL
TAKES ALL OF MILWAUKEE



Greater Milwaukee
FOUNDATION
greater together

"In AAPI communities, giving is more than an action – it's an ethic, shaped by cultural heritage and collective care. It's a privilege to uplift and empower that philanthropic ethic as we continue to build trusted relationships across the region."

TRENLAN POUNDS

Philanthropic Adviser, Greater Milwaukee Foundation



"Joining the Community Adviser and Ambassador Network reminded me that philanthropy goes beyond writing a check. Whether you're giving your time, talents, treasure or ties, every act matters. There are countless ways to make a meaningful impact, and every contribution – big or small – helps us build stronger, healthier communities."

EMILY TAU

Director of Public Affairs, Milwaukee County
2024 Jackie Herd-Barber Award Winner

A MILWAUKEE FOR ALL NEEDS AAPI PERSPECTIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

In collaboration with donors and community leaders across the region, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation is ushering in a fresh perspective on philanthropy – one in which all voices are valued and differences drive progress.

You don't have to look far to see the new face of philanthropy. It's in every entrepreneur, executive leader, young professional and community member who shares time, talent, treasure and ties for the betterment of our community.

Such generosity has upheld greater Milwaukee's Asian American and Pacific Islander communities for generations. Trusted advisers uplift business owners and unlock economic mobility. Donors and grantmakers spark and sustain impactful initiatives. Educators and

mentors inspire the next generation to reach new heights and continue a legacy of giving.

Strengthened by cultural heritage and responsive to changing landscapes, AAPI philanthropists enrich and empower our region from every angle. Bridging the diverse voices is a shared commitment to giving what we can and learning collaboratively.

We celebrate AAPI leaders and the multitude of ways they exemplify dedication to community, dynamic new modes of philanthropy and the tools to create a thriving, inclusive, interconnected tomorrow.

Our community is strongest in partnership. Join us as we build a Milwaukee for all.



Performers at the Asian Moon Festival, hosted by the Wisconsin Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

PHILANTHROPY IS A TEAM SPORT

ARVIND GOPALRATNAM HAS EXPERIENCE RALLYING THE COMMUNITY BEHIND A COMMON GOAL.

As senior vice president of corporate social responsibility for the Milwaukee Bucks, he brings a team mentality to his perspectives on philanthropy. For both the AAPI community and the broader philanthropic sector, he sees collaboration and consistent engagement as critical tools for progress.

How do you see Milwaukee's Indian and AAPI communities connecting with philanthropy in our region?

Over the last decade I've continued to see the Indian community get more engaged in Milwaukee and our southeastern Wisconsin community. The increase is notable, especially with younger professionals, who recognize their ability to make a difference and support the next generation.

Culturally speaking, being active members of our community is something we've always prioritized, but our philanthropy has been more focused on our Indian community than on those around us. In the last 10 to 15 years or so, we've become much more outward in community development and impact, and that's exciting and refreshing to see.

How do we benefit when communities work together?

The only way we're going to make our community stronger is by leveraging and involving the voices of all of our community

members. We live in a diverse region of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, so whether it is the Indian community, the broader Asian community or minority communities all around, representation and voice of the people is something that strengthens us. It's only going to help us as we raise the next generation to find ways to make our community stronger and more equitable for everybody.

What goals or hopes do you hold for the philanthropic sector?

The goals I have continue to be some of the same ones I've had over the last few years. I want to see our philanthropic sector continue to collaborate instead of working in silos, and to use joint philanthropy and collaborative impact to have a stronger influence on what our community needs to see, whether that's access to food, housing security or stronger health and wellness access. We can do better if we all work together a little bit more and continue to pool our resources in impactful ways.

How can we ensure that more people see themselves in philanthropy?

One of the most important things I try to do, both with the Bucks and out in the community, is remind people that engagement comes in many different forms. We often summarize that through this concept of philanthropy, but philanthropy can be financial giving, it can be giving your time, it can be giving your expertise, it can be sharing your knowledge. It can be through volunteerism,

coaching your local sports team, being engaged at your local faith organization. There are so many ways to be philanthropic, and every individual can find their own entry point.

Those steps that you take with consistent engagement lead to more strategic engagement, which leads to broader philanthropy. I hope members of our community take those little steps each day to participate and to engage – it builds a stronger community at its foundation.



“Working for the Bucks has opened my eyes to not only the diversity of our community **but also the commonalities we share.**”

ARVIND GOPALRATNAM

Senior Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility, Milwaukee Bucks

FEATURE

BUILDING A THRIVING ECOSYSTEM

THE WISCONSIN CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S INCLUSIVE OUTLOOK ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The Wisconsin Chinese Chamber of Commerce (WCCC) started small – about 20 entrepreneurs getting together to network and share their experiences as Chinese small business owners.

In the years since its 2017 founding, WCCC has rapidly ascended to become one of the largest Asian American business networks in the state, welcoming 200 members and counting. The chamber has received grants from numerous regional funders, including the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, and its business members range from small nonprofits to corporate mainstays.

To CEO Ziming Wu, the rapid growth is a testament to entrepreneurs' enthusiasm to support one another, celebrate cultural heritage and drive economic success for generations to come. Under his leadership, the growth has also come with an increased focus on diversity, with members coming from not only the broader AAPI community, but also other communities of color and beyond.

"We don't want to work alone in Chinese or even AAPI communities," Wu said. "We're looking at the whole – our mission is to help build the ecosystem across Wisconsin. People join us because they don't feel alone when they come here."

For many small businesses, WCCC's most impactful offering is digital marketing support. A \$1.5 million state grant in 2022 enabled the approach, which spotlights chamber members with blog articles, website listings, and professional video promotion across social media networks. For businesses, especially within less prominent AAPI communities, the gift of visibility can be immeasurable.

The chamber also empowers established businesses through its Business Accelerator Program, which includes one-on-one consulting, professional workshops and funding guidance. With support from a 2024 Foundation grant, a similar incubator for startups and early-stage businesses is on the way, catered to the unique needs of new business owners.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our communities," said Wu. "Our goal with these programs is to help entrepreneurs turn their visions into reality and ensure they have the tools they need to thrive. In doing so, we also provide business leaders with a space to support each other with their own skills and networks."

Cultural events provide some of the most meaningful spaces for connection. To Wu,

supporting celebrations like the Dragon Boat Festival, Lunar New Year and the Hmong New Year means supporting kinship at its most authentic. The culmination is the chamber's signature annual event, the Asian Moon Festival. Held in September, the festival features diverse cultural performances, business excellence awards, keynote speakers and vendor tents for businesses to connect with community members.

For board chair Tone Ly, whose family came to the United States from Vietnam in 1979, the cultural component of the chamber's work is critical.

"Growing up in Milwaukee, I didn't know any other Chinese families," he said. "Having a strong Chinese and AAPI community, which I never knew growing up – that's a huge thing for me. I see giving back as a must."

Looking forward, Wu, Ly and the rest of WCCC's leadership see partnership as the most critical element to progress. Their vision of an inclusive, collaborative business ecosystem gets closer with every new connection, whether at a workshop, a cultural celebration or a conversation with a peer.

What they hope to find: a belief in the region's potential and an inclination to give back.

"When I see another business not thriving, it hurts me," Ly said. "Whether you're Chinese, Asian, Black, Latino, Caucasian, it hurts me, because there's so much business out there. All you need is a little support and everyone can thrive."

"Our goal is not just to support businesses, but to build a **thriving ecosystem** where diversity and innovation go hand in hand."

ZIMING WU

CEO, Wisconsin Chinese Chamber of Commerce



Ziming Wu (left) and Tone Ly

HONORING

*the generosity of
the Asian American
and Pacific Islander
community*

WE ARE

WE SHARE OUR TIME



Dr. Devarati Syam's commitment to community impact began as a teenager in India, where she tutored fellow students.

"It started in a very organic way," she said. "In a place where people of different incomes and backgrounds cohabit in close proximity, you naturally help people. You might not call it philanthropy, but you are doing your part."

Today, as a program manager for the Medical College of Wisconsin's **Health Equity Scholars Program (HESP)**, Dr. Syam dedicates her time to providing similar organic opportunities for medical students. Through health equity training, community partnership and placement at ThriveOn King, the program is designed for Milwaukee's future.

"I always think of HESP as much larger than the walls of the medical college," she said. "We are preparing students whose presence will have ripple effects throughout the community. We hope to have a substantial long-term impact on how they will practice."

WE SHARE OUR TALENT



When **Michael Nguyen** thinks about giving, he thinks about his mom – a Vietnamese refugee who made a new life in the United States. Even as their family faced a new reality, she dedicated time and energy to helping other refugees.

"To join Teach for America was to make sure I carried the values of supporting folks who are navigating this country and trying to succeed," Nguyen said. "Because that was my family."

As executive director of **Teach for America Milwaukee**, Nguyen wants an excellent education for every child, something he says will only happen by developing and sustaining the talent to teach them, and by building a community that's active in its own progress.

"Part of the reason people stay in an area is because of relationships, shared values, and the ability to see how they make an impact," he said. "That's what's kept me here."

PHILANTHROPISTS

WE SHARE OUR TREASURE



Marshall Chay named his donor advised fund the **ACME Foundation Fund** after his children. Every year, their family gets together to discuss where to make gifts – part of Marshall’s effort to pass a legacy of philanthropy to the next generation.

“When I was growing up in Korea, we were very poor, and I saw the effects of giving back,” he said. “Anything that I’ve lived through, I try to say, how can I make sure someone else doesn’t go through that?”

Ever since owning several McDonald’s restaurants in Milwaukee, he has felt profoundly connected to the city’s needs and potential. He’s been inspired, too, by other Asian leaders in the region and is eager to see increased collaboration.

“I think Milwaukee’s AAPI community is underserved, and we can be fragmented,” he said. “I would love to help in any way to get the groups together and show the rest of the community how resourceful we are.”

WE SHARE OUR TIES



In Hmong culture, *sib pauv zog* refers to reciprocal giving – I support you in your time of need, you support me later. **Dr. Maysee Herr** connects the phrase to the mission of the **Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce**, which she leads, and her hope for others to pay it forward.

“Our ultimate goal is to help business owners build generational wealth, not just for their families, but for the communities they are a part of,” she said. “That’s our north star.”

Philanthropy, Dr. Herr says, is relatively new for Milwaukee’s Asian communities, especially the lower income groups the chamber focuses on. By empowering entrepreneurs with loans, business assistance and expanded networks, she sees progress underway.

“It takes all of us,” she said. “We have to see us all as part of the fabric of the communities in which we live, and to reach out to help every person thrive.”

JOIN US

TIME

- **Engage in the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's stakeholder opportunities**, including visioning sessions, tours and events
- **Consider joining the Foundation's Community Adviser & Ambassador Network (CAAN)**, comprised of leaders and professional advisers with diverse backgrounds and a passion for philanthropy and service

TALENT

- **Volunteer with a nonprofit** by joining a board, serving on a committee or sharing your expertise
- **Provide pro bono consulting services** to a nonprofit of interest

TREASURE

- **Start or grow a fund** at the Foundation
- **Create a legacy gift** through the Foundation to ensure an impact
- **Coinvest in our strategic priorities** to advance community outcomes including economic mobility, educational opportunity, health equity and housing security

TIES

- **Introduce members of your network** to the Foundation
- **Refer a community leader or professional adviser** to join CAAN

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation is YOUR community foundation, and charitable partnership is YOUR chance to share your unique gifts in this collaborative work. **In partnership, we can move greater Milwaukee forward together.**



The Wisconsin Museum of Quilts & Fiber Arts hosted Jennifer Kim Sohn's exhibition *25 Million Stitches: One Stitch, One Refugee*, a visualization of the scale of human displacement. The exhibition was supported in part by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Photo by Plum Media.



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