

CELEBRATING AAPI PHILANTHROPISTS

BUILDING A MILWAUKEE FOR ALL TAKES ALL OF MILWAUKEE



Wisconsin has the third largest Hmong population in the country at over 58,000, and Milwaukee has the largest Hmong population in the state.



"Philanthropy is a vital part to a holistic commitment to celebrating and uplifting the community, positively. The more philanthropy unifies and funds collaborations, the more we can make greater change together."

ARVIND GOPALRATNAM

Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility, Milwaukee Bucks;
Executive Director, Milwaukee Bucks Foundation

A MILWAUKEE FOR ALL NEEDS AAPI VOICES AND VISIONS

With the Greater Together campaign, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation is rallying our region around a collective vision of a Milwaukee for all – a future in which all of us can achieve our fullest potential.

Across decades, Milwaukee's rich tapestry of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities has made our region a culturally vibrant and welcoming home for generations of residents and newcomers alike, and a beacon of diversity in our state and beyond.

Throughout the many distinct AAPI communities who call Milwaukee home, leaders have stepped forward to lift up their neighbors and make Milwaukee a better place for everyone: to start businesses, found schools and build pillars of community health; to counter hate and violence with bridges of support, solidarity and hope; to celebrate and share cultural

heritage; to raise visibility and share the joy of giving back together.

Through countless acts of generosity, creativity and care, Milwaukeeans from diverse AAPI communities have shown the power of philanthropy in its most fundamental form. All of Milwaukee benefits as a result.

As we celebrate the contributions of AAPI Milwaukeeans and look ahead to the future, we know that the voices of Milwaukee's AAPI leaders need to be heard, and the work of Milwaukee's AAPI communities deserves to be seen and supported. And in our effort to reimagine philanthropy, we recognize the gifts of time, talent, treasure and ties that all contribute to our region's greater potential.

Join us in the transformational work of building a Milwaukee for all.



LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

FROM PAIN TO PROMISE

PARDEEP KALEKA'S LIFE CHANGED FOREVER ON AUG. 5, 2012, when his father was one of seven people killed in a racially motivated mass shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek. He responded with a defiant hope and a commitment to Milwaukee's future: a powerful testimony to how our lowest moments can spark transformational change.

How did the Sikh temple shooting, and the personal tragedy you experienced, shift your perspective on community?

In 2012, people responded. As much as we felt like we were going through that by ourselves, we realized that we weren't alone as soon as we walked out of the door. We saw a diverse community full of different races, faces, faiths say, hey, you know what, I'm here. I may not know what to say to you because I don't know how to speak your language, but I do know how to show up. And that was the universal language of empathy that we all have.

Now, how do we as a society exercise that muscle of empathy as we go forward? With eight billion people, right? These are unprecedented times. We have never seen what we are seeing now with the population, with the environmental challenges, with some of the social challenges that we face. If we don't exercise that muscle of empathy to grow stronger and stronger, we will not have the compassion we need to sustain life for so many people.

It's one thing to respond to a terrible event, but how can that empathy muscle come into play before violence happens, in a preventive way?

Yeah, that's a great question. We have to teach social and emotional growth to an entire society. And that means education has to look different. It has to be revamped. No longer do we need to memorize things.

And we need to scale this. It needs to happen at the workplace where people spend 8 to 10 hours a day. It needs to happen everywhere. It needs to be infused in the culture of America – to ask, how do we create a healthier society where people are happier and joyous?

What challenges do you see in that effort in Milwaukee in particular, and what strengths do you see?

I'll start off with the strengths. I see really, really good people doing a lot of great work and taking up almost Herculean efforts. You have great leaders in the Black community, Latino community, every single community. You have lots of people who

are contributing to the greater good of what Milwaukee looks like now.

But I've been working in the city for the past 25 plus years in the capacity of a therapist, of a police officer, of an educator and many other different roles in community. Some of the challenges we face are a product of systemic failures that happened in the late 70s, early 80s.

When people understand that there have been systemic failures, fine, that's been done. It's in the past, but it's still affecting the present and the future. So let's do something about it.

I think we have to be reflective as leaders, and as people who want change and reform, to see things differently. And we have to change our lens of what value and worth and dignity look like as well.



“Human beings have an innate capability to cause harm, **but they have much more of an innate capability to heal.**”

PARDEEP KALEKA

FEATURE

DREAMS OF EXCELLENCE

CHRIS HER-XIONG CONNECTS HERITAGE AND HOPES AT THE HMONG AMERICAN PEACE ACADEMY

On a cold December night in 1976, 10-year-old **Chris Her-Xiong**, then Nou Her, stepped off a plane in Des Moines, Iowa, and was enchanted by beautiful lights.

“Maybe I died and went to heaven!” she remembers thinking.

The lights were Christmas decorations – the first of many firsts for Her-Xiong and her family, who had escaped from Laos as refugees when their homeland became too dangerous for many Hmong people after the Vietnam War.

In Iowa, Her-Xiong and her sister had to learn English quickly to help their parents navigate their new world. She remembers learning to hold a pencil and practicing drawing circles, her first step to learning cursive. She learned, too, how to navigate an intersection of identities, respecting cultural traditions while embracing new dreams.

Those dreams took Her-Xiong first through Central College in Iowa and then to Story School in Milwaukee as the first Hmong teacher at Milwaukee Public Schools. In 2000, a visit to the same refugee camps that her family stayed at in Thailand inspired her biggest dream of all: the Hmong American Peace Academy (HAPA).

HAPA, a charter school in Milwaukee’s Lindsay Park neighborhood, opened in 2004 with 200 students and just 13 employees, with Her-Xiong at the helm. A focus group helped her select three guiding pillars that remain paramount to HAPA to this day: cultural heritage, academic rigor and a character of peacebuilding.

Her-Xiong had lofty aspirations for her school, but she credits the United Community Center’s **Ricardo Diaz** for reminding her to start small.

“Now Chris, you need to take baby steps,” she remembers him saying often.

The patience paid off, as HAPA now serves over 1,800 students from kindergarten through high school, with over 175 employees on staff. 98% of HAPA students identify as Hmong or Asian, and 82% qualify as economically disadvantaged.

Her-Xiong is proud of the school’s graduation rate of nearly 95%, as well as its success in promoting peacebuilding: in nearly 20 years, she has rarely needed to suspend a student. She is also proud of HAPA’s growing holistic services, from school-based health to professional development for teachers.

Most of all, Her-Xiong is proud that the school has become a transformational organization, helping children and families break the cycle of poverty and pursue excellence in whatever brings them joy. In her mind, all of Milwaukee benefits from that.

None of it would be possible, Her-Xiong said, without HAPA's focus on cultural strength.

"If you understand who you are, you can maintain it and share your heritage with others, and that helps you be a healthy, balanced young person," she said. "Without knowing who you are, you're going to struggle and be lost."

Her-Xiong sees Milwaukee's Hmong population as a thriving community but a quiet one, culturally peaceful and more

comfortable away from the spotlight. Through HAPA, she hopes to educate young people about the inequities their community faces and empower them to be more assertive.

They may have no better role model than Her-Xiong. She has won numerous awards for her decades of leadership in Milwaukee's Hmong community – including the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Doug Jansson Leadership Award in 2019 – but she sees her students' achievements as her biggest accolade.

Rooted in heritage, strengthened by character, propelled by rigor, HAPA students are growing into Milwaukee's next leaders, helping Her-Xiong's dreams of excellence come true.

"I believe that the city is transformed from the sheer ambition that turnaround schools are possible, and that **education can deliver on its promise of prosperity.**"

CHRIS HER-XIONG



HONORING

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

WE ARE

WE SHARE OUR TIME



Mayhoua Moua first started cancer prevention work in 2006, hoping to alleviate health disparities in Milwaukee's Southeast Asian community. She never would have guessed that she herself would be diagnosed with leukemia 15 years later.

"When I started this work, I had to borrow people's stories," she said. "Now I have my own."

That story, and all the taxing symptoms and high medical costs that come with it, have deepened her motivation to educate refugees on early recognition and treatment of cancer. The Milwaukee Consortium for Hmong Health, which she leads, has become a trusted space for respite, open conversation and a feeling of home for community members.

It has also become a place for Moua to share her journey and, hopefully, save lives.

"I feel that I'm given this illness to experience, to understand and to share," she said.

WE SHARE OUR TALENT



Emily Tau can hardly enter a building in Milwaukee without seeing someone she knows or making a new friend. Her favorite part of the city is the people – that's what inspired her career in public service.

"When some people talk about improving Milwaukee, they're talking about infrastructure downtown or bringing in large corporations," she said. "I'm talking about improving the lives of people who live here."

Working in communications for the Milwaukee Health Department, Tau sometimes feels her role is small in the face of systemic challenges. Joining the Foundation's Community Adviser & Ambassador Network helped remind her that every contribution helps.

"If your intentions behind it are pure and you really do care about the community you're serving," she said, "whatever you're able to do is going to have a benefit and be appreciated."

PHILANTHROPISTS

WE SHARE OUR TREASURE



A chair, a tarp, dishes: **Sarah Berg** and her wife **Amy Underberg** have given enough away that their Bay View neighbors affectionately refer to their house as “the warehouse.” To Berg, that’s philanthropy.

“People might not think of it that way, but I’m helping somebody else out,” she said. “It’s not so hoity-toity.”

Sarah’s mother, **Insoo Kim Berg**, was a Korean immigrant, Foundation fund holder and a pioneer in solution-focused brief therapy, a method that helps psychotherapy clients identify the strengths and solutions they already have. Sarah Berg, also a fund holder, draws lessons from that framework when making fund decisions – she and Underberg rarely place restrictions on their donations, letting communities identify their own solutions.

“I’d rather just give the money and know that the people I’m giving to know what to do with it,” she said.

WE SHARE OUR TIES



When **Erik Kennedy** brings people together, he has a rule: no ask and no agenda.

“Too many times, we as a community have a very cliquy mentality,” he said. “A lot of people want to know what your ask is and what you are going to deliver for them.”

Instead of purely transactional networking, Kennedy, a Korean adoptee, is interested in fostering open, intentional connections. Whether through events with ElevAsian, the AAPI community-building organization he cofounded, or more informal work like group volunteering and “breaking bread” dinners, Kennedy is always thinking of new ways to serve as a connector and build a more equitable Milwaukee.

“If we’re committed to equity, inclusion and social justice,” he said, “then we need to use our voices, resources and networks to raise visibility, promote stakeholders and connect people and organizations with one another.”

JOIN US

TIME

- **Engage in the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's public convenings**, including visioning sessions and speaker series
- **Consider joining the Foundation's Community Adviser & Ambassador Network (CAAN)**, comprised of racially and ethnically diverse leaders and professional advisers with a passion for philanthropy and service

TALENT

- **Join the board of a nonprofit** working to advance racial equity and inclusion
- **Provide pro bono consulting services** to a nonprofit of interest

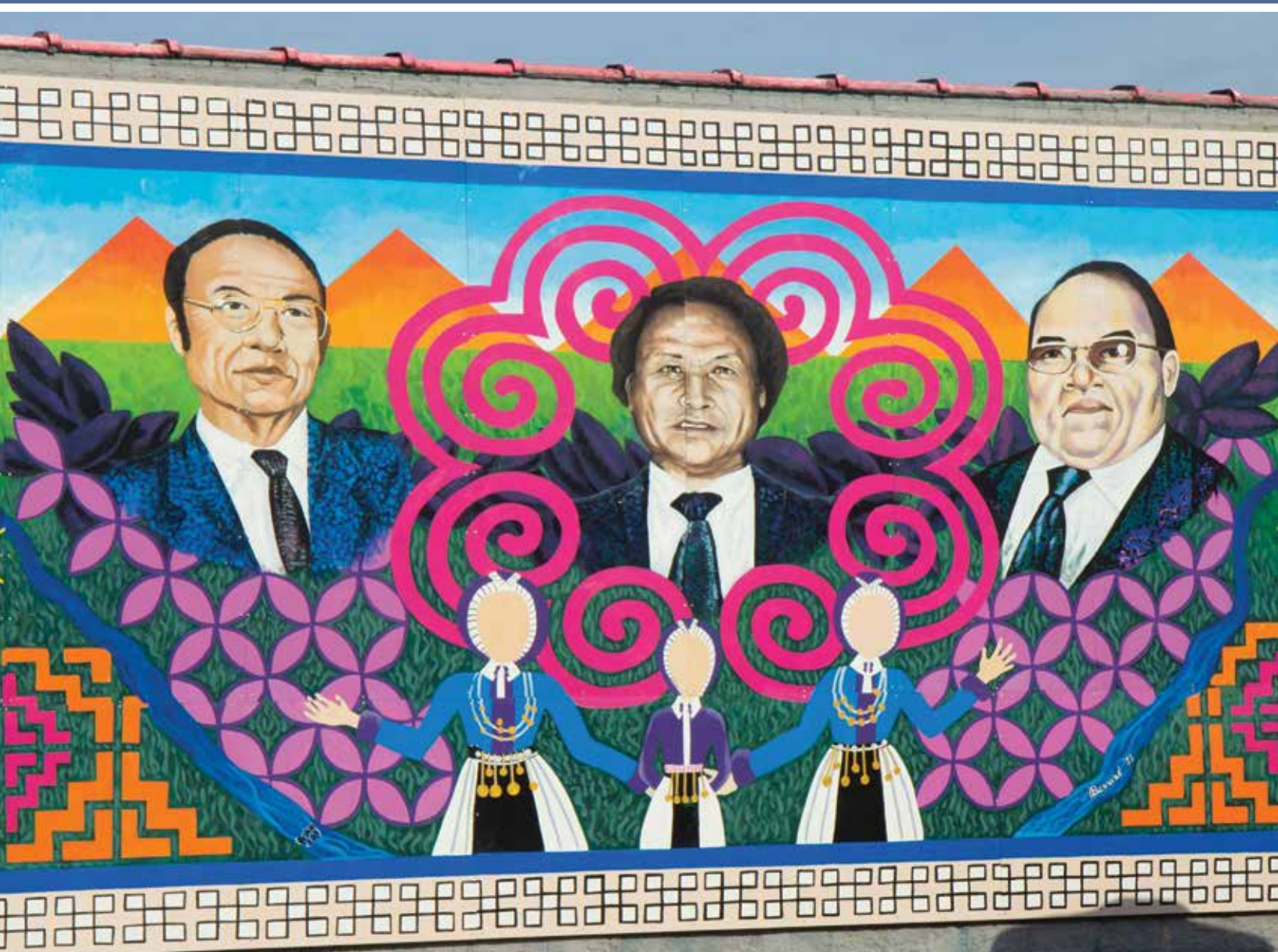
TREASURE

- **Start or grow a fund** at the Foundation
- **Create a legacy gift** through the Foundation to ensure an impact
- **Coinvest in our campaign priorities** of Early Childhood Care and Education, Housing, Impact Investing, the ThriveOn Collaboration and Flexible Funding

TIES

- **Consider who in your network would be interested** in learning more about the Foundation and provide an introduction
- **Refer a community leader or professional adviser** to join CAAN

The Greater Together campaign seeks to raise \$700 million to build a Milwaukee for all. The Greater Milwaukee Foundation is YOUR foundation, and the Greater Together campaign is YOUR chance to share your unique gifts in this collaborative work. Together, we can build a Milwaukee for all.



Mural created by Brad Bernard and Ruthie Joy for the Hmong American Friendship Association

GREATER TOGETHER

THE CAMPAIGN TO BUILD A MILWAUKEE FOR ALL

greatermilwaukeefoundation.org/campaign

