



Hmong Culture

In an effort to promote diversity in our organization, the Diversity Committee is pleased to present this article on the Hmong culture. This article provides an overview of one aspect of the rich diversity in our community. Special thanks to Pahoua Xiong of the United Hmong Association, Inc. for authoring this article.

About the Hmong Culture....

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the Hmong have resettled from Southeast Asia to Australia, France, Canada, Germany, Argentina and the United States. The United States has the largest Hmong refugee community with an estimated population of about 300,000 in 2001. During the Vietnam War, Hmong were recruited by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to be the “secret soldiers” in the Secret War in Laos.

According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, there are about 15,000 Hmong in North Carolina, making it the fourth largest Hmong population in the United States next to Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin. The majority of the Hmong in North Carolina are in the western part of the state.

The Hmong are organized into “clan” or “xeem.” There are about 18 clans within the Hmong community. These are Chang, Cheng, Chue, Fang, Hang, Her, Khang,

Kong, Kue, Lee, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong and Yang.

The Hmong culture is a paternal lineage in that the male is the leader of the household and makes most of the important decisions. In addition, all children are members of the father’s clan and this is how they trace their ancestors beginning from birth.

Hmong clan groups are exogamous. This means that Hmong may not marry within their own clan group. For example, a Vang cannot marry another Vang no matter if they are related or not.

The Hmong believe in hard work and that by working hard, anything is possible. With the two hands they are given, there should be no excuse for not being able to get the basic food needs with the help of the clan. The Hmong also place a great deal of value in helping one another.

Traditionally, Hmong women were not allowed to go to school. But that has been changing since the first Hmong arrived in the United States. Tradition has always promoted that the Hmong men attend school. While Hmong women are taught the basic household chores to ensure that when she gets marry, she will be a well-prepared “future” daughter-in-law.

In addition, traditionally, Hmong practice shamanism. The shaman is a healing



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practitioner who acts as an intermediary between the spirit and the real world. But now it is about half of the Hmong that follow traditional or practice Christianity.

The Hmong New Year is the only cultural celebration that the Hmong can claim as their own. This takes place usually after harvest season in the fall. Furthermore, this is the

only time that officially, in the old days, Hmong boys and girls could court each other publicly. Otherwise, they would have to court secretly.

County employees **SHOULD NOT** "assume" that all Hmong are the same or look alike. As in all cultures, each individual has their own background and family stories to tell.