



©MNHS Collections

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

NOURISHING OUR SPIRITS, GROWING OUR FUTURES

The ***Rooted in Resilience*** poster exhibit was created in partnership with the Minnesota Historical Society and the Hmong Advisory Task Force. The Task Force was formed with the intention of reflecting the Hmong community to celebrate 50 years of resettlement in Minnesota. As a part of this effort, we gathered input about historic milestones within the community by offering surveys to attendees of the 2024 Hmong New Year celebration held in St. Paul. This process informed the creation of this resource and the small portion of Hmong Minnesotan history that it covers. This resource is *not* a comprehensive review of Hmong American history but a snapshot into some significant moments, individuals, and organizations across the past 50 years. This is intended to be an educational resource inspired by the Smithsonian poster exhibit, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and WWII*.

50 YEARS OF Hmong

IN MINNESOTA

In 1975, the first Hmong family arrived in Minnesota, marking the beginning of what has become the largest Hmong community in the US. Since then, Hmong Minnesotans have thrived in politics, education, business, food/agriculture, the arts, and beyond. As we reach this momentous milestone, we highlight some of the histories and individuals that exemplify the legacy of Hmong Minnesotans.

“AS LONG AS WE
ARE ALIVE, WE CAN
REBUILD OUR LIVES.”
- DR. YANG DAO

Hmong students at Lao Family Community and the Young Men Christian’s Association.



Qeej class at Hmong Language and Culture School in 2007.



Participants in the St. Paul 2024 Hmong New Year celebration play pov pob, a Hmong ball tossing game.

POLITICS

LEADERS IN OUR COMMUNITY

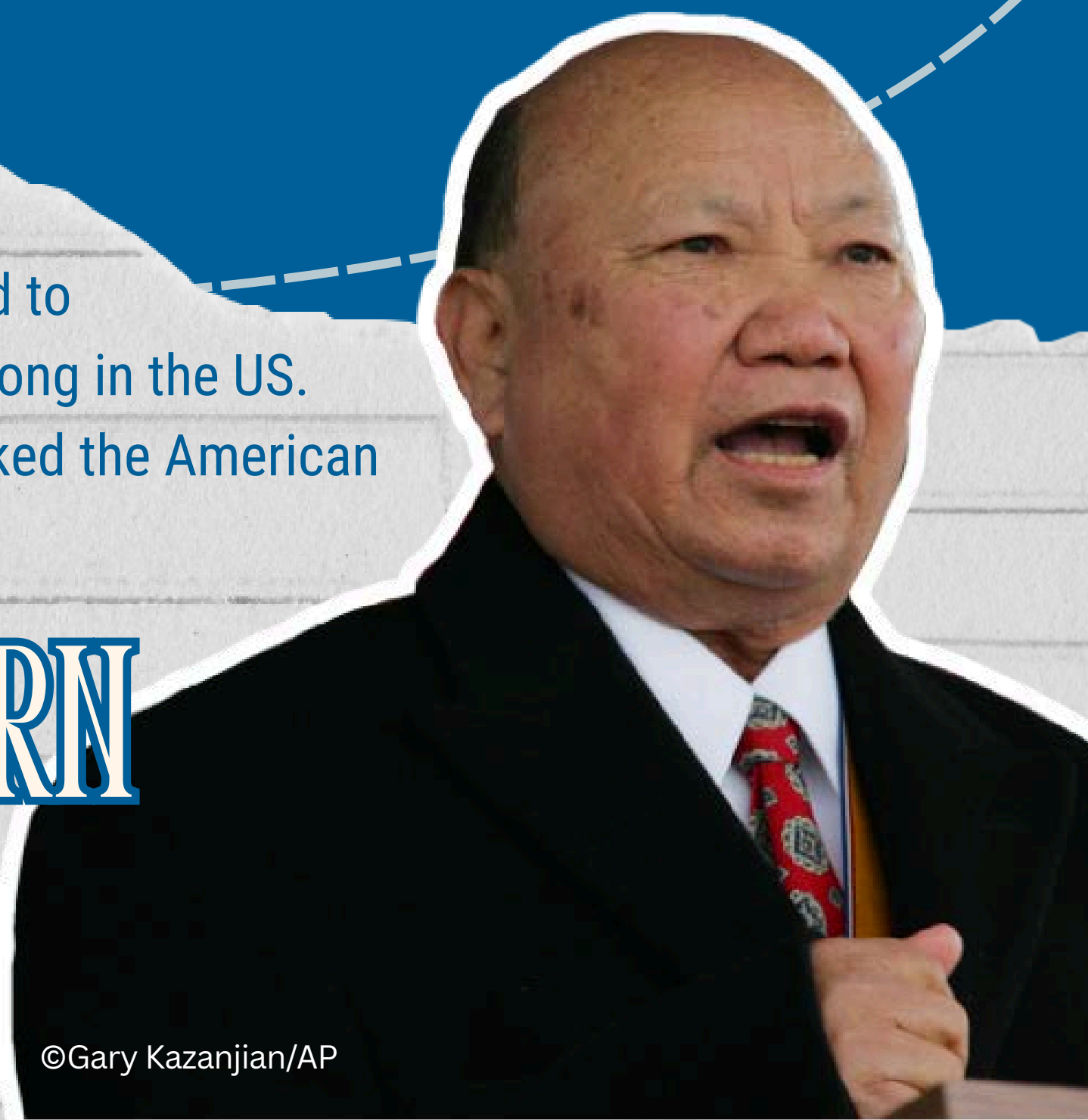
From establishing support and infrastructure for refugees in Minnesota, to representation in state politics, the past 50 years have shown the commitment Hmong Americans have to advocating for equity and their communities.



Mayor-elect Kaohly Her and Representative Tou Xiong are among the great number of Hmong Americans rising in politics in the Twin Cities. From taking on the issues of local politics to cultural preservation, they make strident efforts to build on representation of the Hmong community in government and address needs of constituents in their platforms.

General Vang Pao advocated for the resettlement of Hmong refugees in Minnesota, Wisconsin and California. He also worked to establish charities that supported farming and education for Hmong in the US. To many, Vang Pao is remembered for his initiative in what sparked the American chapter of Hmong history.

**"WHEN I DIE, LET ME BE BORN
HMONG AGAIN"** - GENERAL
VANG PAO



EDUCATION

Child at Community School of Excellence, Hmong Language and Culture School. 2007

©MNHS Collections

Amidst the adjustment to life in Minnesota, there have been intentional efforts to preserve the education of Hmong history, culture, and language through curricular changes, the establishment of Hmong charter schools, and founding of Hmong studies departments at local universities.



"I ALWAYS SAY THAT
STORYTELLING IS IN
MY BLOOD AND IT'S IN
MY DNA AS A HMONG
PERSON."

-CHENUE HER

First graduating class, Lao Family Community, 1981. Founded in 1977 as the **Hmong Association of Minnesota**, the organization offered educational programs to assist new immigrants.

AGRICULTURE



Vendor at the St. Paul farmers market in Lowertown, 1988.

"WE NEED TO SHARE THESE GREENS TO STAY ALIVE. IT'S NOT ABOUT HOW BIG YOUR GARDEN IS. WHATEVER YOU HAVE, YOU SHARE IT." -ZONGXEE LEE

Agriculture has played a key role in Hmong survival for many generations. Since the exodus from China, the Hmong's knowledge of cultivation has traversed across lands, boundaries, and language.

Today, Hmong farmers make up fifty percent of the vendors at St. Paul and Minneapolis farmers markets and the tradition of ua liaj ua teb continues to be maintained in backyard gardens and vast Minnesotan farmlands.

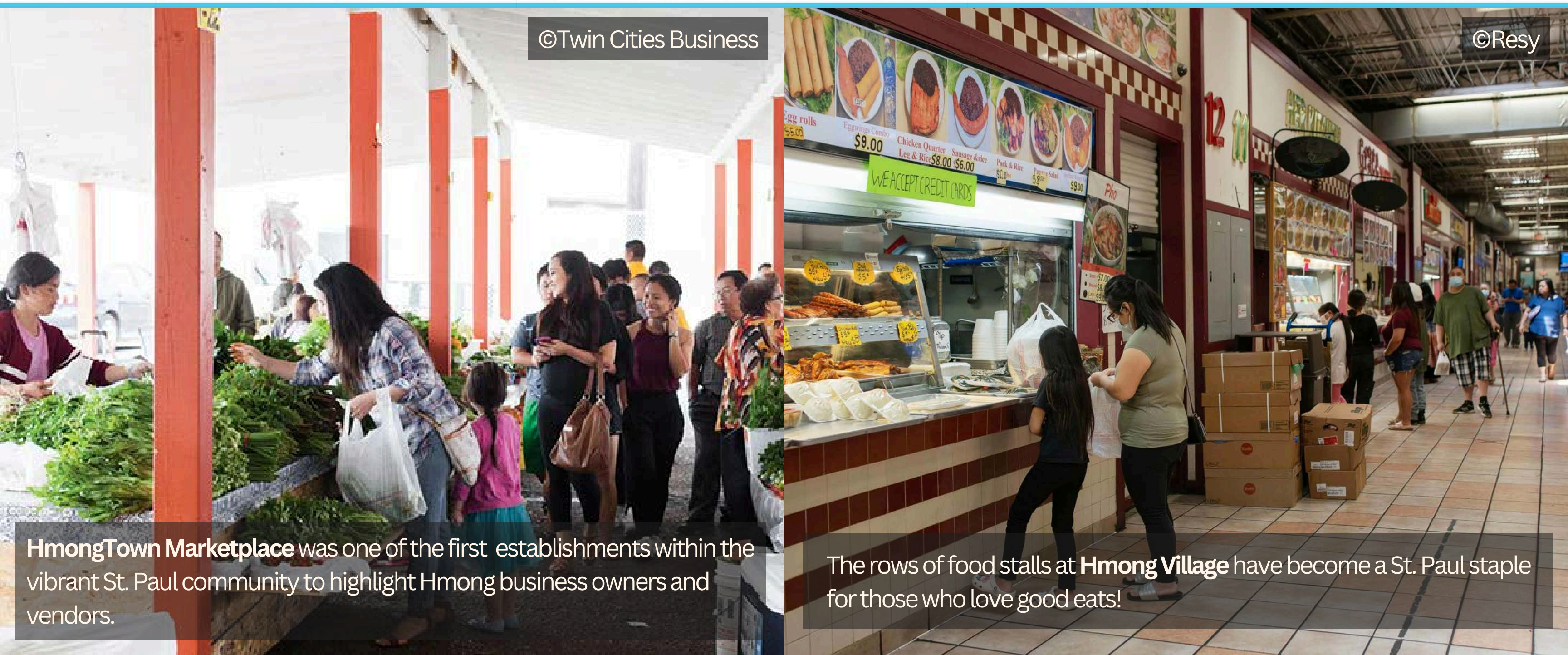


BUSINESS

Hmong leaders are entrepreneurs, business owners, vendors, managers, employees, and much more! The last 50 years have been about paving a strong, visible foundation within sectors of the Minnesotan economy for more and more Hmong business owners to build upon.

"HMONG MINNESOTANS NOT ONLY REVIVED, BUT SUSTAINED, AND PERPETUATED THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY OF MANY MANY NEIGHBORHOODS—BOTH IN MINNEAPOLIS, ST. PAUL AND THE SURROUNDING SUBURBS."

- MEE MOUA



©Twin Cities Business

©Resy

HmongTown Marketplace was one of the first establishments within the vibrant St. Paul community to highlight Hmong business owners and vendors.

The rows of food stalls at **Hmong Village** have become a St. Paul staple for those who love good eats!

ARTS



©Pagnia Xiong

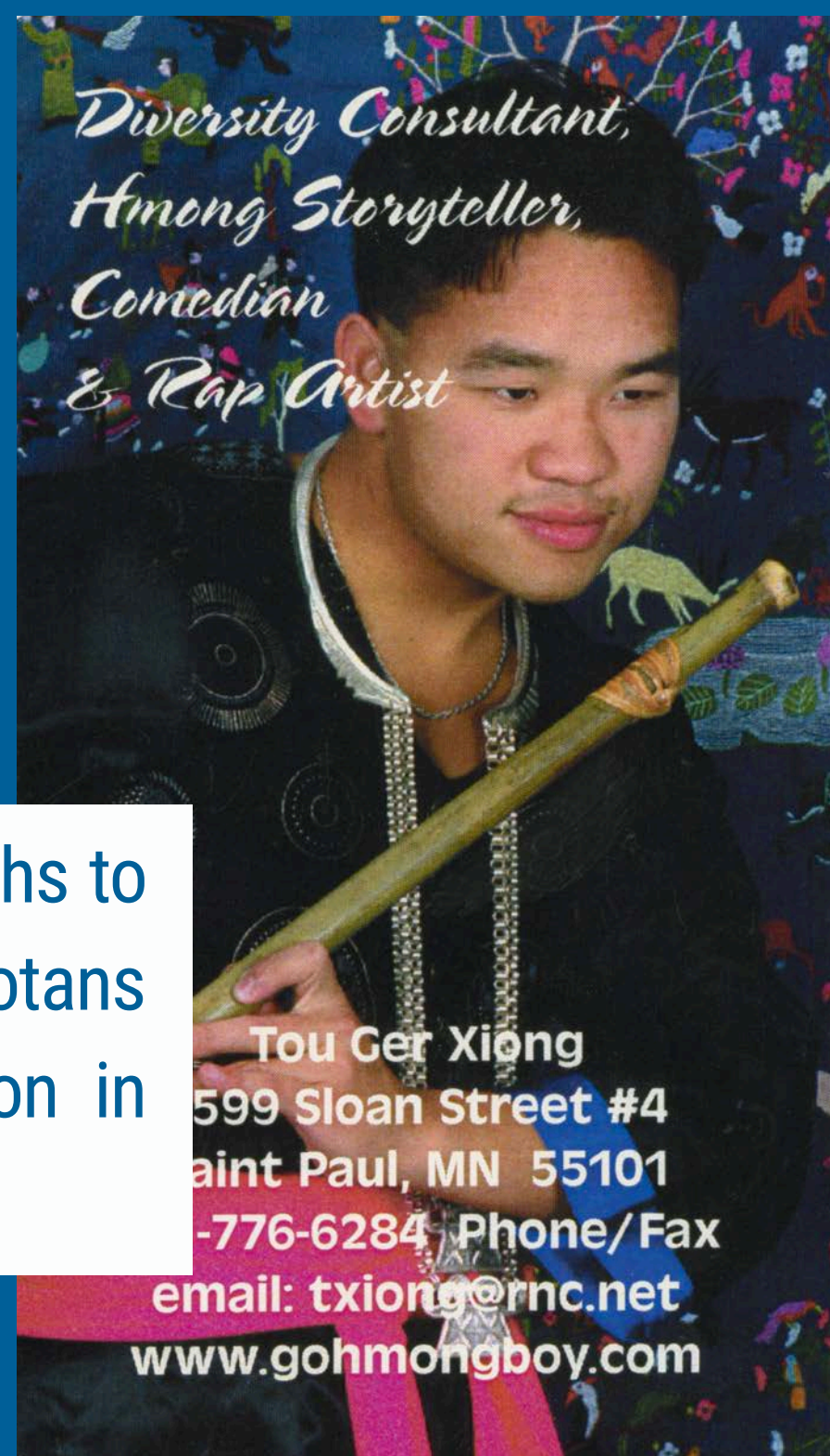
From weaving tales of history into *paj ntaub* story cloths to performing woeful 2000's rock songs, Hmong Minnesotans have fostered a vibrant culture of artistic expression in various mediums. To be Hmong is to ponder creation.

Pagnia Xiong is a prolific Hmong singer in the Twin Cities who proudly represents her Hmong heritage through her performances and songs.



©MNHS Collections

Minnesota photographer **Pao Houa Her's** *Hmong Veteran, Smoke In The Prairie*, and *My grandmother's favorite grandchild*. Her is an award winning photographer who features interpretations of Hmong history and diaspora in her art.



Tou Ger Xiong's business card circa 2001. Xiong was known in the community not just for his artistic talents, but also for his commitment to activism and social justice education.

©MNHS Collections

Tou Ger Xiong
599 Sloan Street #4
Saint Paul, MN 55101
-776-6284 Phone/Fax
email: txiong@rnc.net
www.gohmongboy.com



©MNHS Collections

Hmong rock group and Hmong dancers at University of Minnesota, Willey Hall. 1981.

WHAT CAN WE CREATE?



CULTURE OWNING OUR IDENTITY

Events like the Hmong Freedom Festival and Hmong New Year are among the many occasions where Hmong Minnesotans honor their cultural legacies.

The preservation of Hmong culture has been an effort sustained by many remarkable members within the community. From trailblazing journalists and athletes to resplendent events, the Hmong are represented in many facets of the Minnesotan and American zeitgeist, working to further what it means to nourish, grow, and add to a peoples and its culture.

Sunisa Lee's triumphant performance at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics earned her a gold medal and brought much pride to her hometown of St. Paul. She is the first Hmong person to compete and win in any Olympic games.

Award-winning playwright **Katie Ka Vang** has written notable plays that explore themes of community in diaspora such as *Again* and *Sixpack* for local Twin Cities theaters.





Shades of Yellow (SOY) was a Hmong LGBTQIA+ organization active between 2003-2017. It was one of the first spaces within the Hmong community to welcome and affirm discussions of intersectional and queer identities. Now, organizations like **Transforming Generations** carry on this important work.



©Hmong Americans Farmers Association

ACTIVISM & ORGANIZING

The Twin Cities were such a large site of resettlement for Hmong coming to America partially because of the number of non-profit organizations that could support incoming refugees. As the years passed, these organizations have only multiplied and grown in size. These grassroots efforts to amplify Hmong voices in the many spaces they inhabit continue to be a way for Hmong Minnesotans to build and share community.

"THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING BACK IS SOMETHING I LEARNED FROM MY PARENTS; IT'S AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE FABRIC OF HMONG CULTURE." -PAKOU HANG





CULTIVATING RESILIENT GENERATIONS

The varying themes of this exhibit highlight where Hmong Minnesotans have made their mark. While these categories cover an array of interests, the through-line between them all is **community**.

The Hmong story is one of survival and persistence and Hmong Minnesotans are bonded by a commitment to cultivate for a future together. This shared responsibility to care for one another has nourished a foundation for one of the most vibrant and resilient communities in Minnesota. Whether through youth, cultural celebrations, or faith practices, community has helped Hmong Minnesotans thrive in the first fifty years of life in America and will continue to support livelihoods for generations to come.

