

Dinner Celebrates Vietnamese Youth Visit to D.C.

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WASHINGTON D.C. - Enthusiasm permeated the Fortune Restaurant as the joyous participants of the Vietnamese American Youth Leadership Conference (VAYLC) 2006 were feted in Arlington, Va., just outside of Washington, D.C. on June 23. The Friday night gala dinner was to be followed by a full day of workshops on community service, media, and careers, building on the preceding days of public policy briefings and Capitol Hill visits, including one to meet James C. Ho, Clerk to Justice Clarence Thomas, U.S. Supreme Court.



The conference was hosted by the National Congress of Vietnamese Americans (NCVA), a non-profit advocacy organization that encourages Vietnamese Americans to be civically engaged. NCVA's president, Hung Quoc Nguyen, served as the master of ceremonies for the dinner and the keynote speaker was Dr. Vu Pham, Project Curator, Smithsonian Institution's Vietnamese American Heritage Project.

Dr. Pham spoke with some pride of the legacy of the Vietnamese presence in America which, unbeknownst to most Americans, pre-dates the Vietnam War. Still, the Smithsonian project, which is scheduled to open this year, will primarily focus on the 30-year history of Vietnamese Americans since their migration to in the United States in the mid 1970s. The exhibit will tour America for three years and assist in the development of curriculum materials, among other objectives. Equally important is the initiative to "establish a permanent \$1 million Vietnamese American endowment at the Smithsonian Institution," according to Pham.



The Freedom Fighter Award went to Vo Thanh Nhan and The Vietnamese American Television for their work in the Gulf region during the Katrina disaster in 2005. The President's Award was shared by the George Washington University's Student Association and the Vietnamese Students Association of the University of Virginia, which also provided the cultural entertainment toward the end of the evening. Program participants hailed from across the United States, a geographic

diversity that the VAYLC program seeks to overcome by forging a common touchstone of Vietnamese community.



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