

Chang dinner benefits leadership institute

Endeavor aims to get more Asians involved in the local political process

By PAM MARINO

Local Asian Americans flexed their financial and political muscles at a recent fundraising dinner honoring Mayor Michael Chang that attracted some of the area's top leaders, as well as some big money.

The dinner, to help finance De Anza College's new Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute, raised \$25,000 on Dec. 11, adding to the \$85,000 that local banks, businesses, and individuals had already donated before the event.

A wide array of people attended the \$25-a-plate dinner and auction, including most of the local Democratic representatives to Sacramento and Washington, D.C., county supervisors Jim Beall and Joe Simitian, local school board members and the entire Cupertino City Council, as well as City Manager Don Brown and Cupertino National Bank founder Don Allen.

The institute is the brainchild of Chang, who teaches intercultural communication at De Anza and chairs the Asian and Asian-American Studies Department. He is the first Asian American mayor of Cupertino, and one of only about three elected Asian Americans out of nearly 100 elected officials on other Bay Area councils and boards. Asian Americans make up about a quarter of the local population—approximately 30 percent of Cupertino's residents.

"The purpose of the institute is for helping Asian American immigrants in particular to participate more fully in American society," Chang said last week. The institute will promote participation in local government, leadership and volunteerism among young people as well as recent immigrants.

"I don't imply that other people don't need to learn it," Chang said, "but immigrants have a little bit more of a challenge." He said that to immigrants who don't understand how local government works, "everything looks mysterious.

"Many of us want to give to the community, and sometimes we don't know how to do it," Chang told the more than 360 people who attended the dinner.

Chang said he got the idea for the institute as local elected and business leaders advised him in his successful campaigns for the Cupertino Union School District Board and the Cupertino City Council. The advice was so good, he said, he thought that everyone should be able to hear it.

The institute will sponsor speakers, classes, workshops, conferences and other events where others can gain some of the same knowledge Chang picked up along the way.

The next step, Chang said, is to hire a director to help organize and shape the direction the institute will go. He said he will meet in January with De Anza College President Martha Kantor; Leo Chavez of the American Leadership Forum; Winnie Chu, associate director of the Community Foundation; Don Allen; and Dean Duane Kubo of the college's Multicultural/International Center to begin the planning process.