

Asian group reaches out to adult leaders

San Jose
Mercury News SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2006

VALLEY INSTITUTE'S INFLUENCE IS GROWING

By Katherine Corcoran

Mercury News

A Silicon Valley Asian-American leadership group that has focused on training high school and college students is expanding to add a senior fellows program for adult leaders, reflecting the maturing and increasing influence of Asian-Americans in the political and civic life of the South Bay.

The DeAnza College-based Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute (APALI) kicks off the new program today with a summit at the college that will bring together some of the area's top civic leaders, judges and elected officials.

"It provides fellowship and growth opportunities for established and recognized Asian-American leaders."

— MICHAEL CHANG, APALI FOUNDER

A breakfast preceding the summit will feature DeAnza President Brian Murphy. Participants will include Superior Court Judge Erica Yew; Cupertino City Councilman Patrick Kwok; Paul Fong, Foothill-DeAnza Community College District board member; Richard Konda, executive director of the Asian Law Alliance, and Michele Lew, executive director of Asian-Americans For Community Involvement.

The program is designed to provide a support network for Asian-American elected and appointed leaders, as well as train future leaders who will give the community a public voice.

"It provides fellowship and growth opportunities for established and recognized Asian-American leaders," said Michael Chang, DeAnza professor who founded APALI in 1997 and who was the first Asian-American elected

CUPERTINO

to the Cupertino City Council. "The ideas come from my own experience that for a lot of leaders, even when they become elected, they still need a lot of support and opportunity to process certain issues that come up."

For example, Chang said, Asian-American leaders, like those from other minority groups, face a higher risk of being "pigeonholed" for their views.

"Should an Asian-American elected official speak up on an Asian-American cause, because when you do that . . . you're perceived as only caring about Asian-American issues," said Chang, who also served two terms as Cupertino mayor. "This creates a forum for people to explore and look at those situations."

The Senior Fellows Program was started by a group of elected officials, American Leadership Forum fellows, and representatives of such community groups as the Asian Law Alliance and Asian-Americans for Community Involvement.

The aim is to build a network of experienced leaders to increase Asian-American representation in decision-making in the valley and to weigh in on policy and legislative issues affecting the Asian-American community.

Organizers at today's summit will develop a policy agenda for the coming year and a steering committee of 20 people that will eventually be expanded to 80 to 100 leaders.

For more information, contact Chang at changmichael@deanza.edu.

Contact Katherine Corcoran at kcorcoran@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5330.