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Two cultures, one goal: leadership

LATINO AND ASIAN-AMERICAN OFFICIALS
JOIN TO PROMOTE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

By Katherine Corcoran

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One emigrated from Hong Kong, the other from Jalisco. One led an upscale, high-tech South Bay community, the other a working-class town.

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Latino leaders join together to boost community. **PAGE 1B**

But former Cupertino Mayor Michael Chang and current East Palo Alto Mayor Ruben Abrica have much in common when it comes to leadership, including that their election to local government reflected major demographic shifts in their respective suburban communities.

Now the two, both faculty members at De Anza College, are teaching a new leadership training program through the Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute, known as APA-LI, that targets Latinos as well as Asian-Americans.

It is the first known official collaboration between the South



Chang
Former Cupertino mayor founded the Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute.



Abrica
Current East Palo Alto mayor also teaches Chicano studies at De Anza College.

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Bay's two largest ethnic groups, which make up two-thirds of the valley's population but far fewer of its officials. Chang and Abrica personify the rapid growth and change in both communities as immigrants who — in less than a generation — became elected leaders.

"What's innovative and cutting edge is nurturing Asian-American and Latino leaders together to prepare them for leading very diverse popula-

tions," said Chang, 49, who founded APALI in 1997. "It goes to the heart of a multicultural democracy."

The De Anza-based Civic Leadership for Community Empowerment, a 10-week seminar that will start next Jan. 10, is designed to prepare Asian and Latino young professionals and college students for leadership posts in nonprofit organizations, appointed boards and commissions, and elected office.

Building bridges

More important, it aims to

fortify ties between two groups around issues both care about, such as anti-immigration or English-only movements. It also can help build bridges in areas where they might be at odds, including affirmative action and allocation of public school resources.

"In politics there is always conflict," said Abrica, 57, who teaches Chicano studies. "If you establish one-on-one, personal relationships, you can call on each other to help mediate."

The two groups have connected around specific issues

LEADERSHIP | Common ground

in the past, going back to the days when Cesar Chavez worked with Filipino-Americans in organizing farmworkers. The Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies and the National Association for Elected Latino Officials have arranged joint leadership training.

And there are countless local political links. U.S. Rep. Mike Honda, D-Campbell, is an Asian-American who speaks Spanish and maintains strong ties with the Latino community, while Margaret Abe-Koga, an Asian-American candidate for Mountain View City Council, joined the Latino community group, Mesa de la Comunidad, in that city last year.

"This reflects what's really new in ethnic politics, say, in the last 10 years," said Louis DiSipio, professor of Chicano/Latino studies at University of California-Irvine. "It's a building of the base beyond national origin, the first step, and pan-ethnic, such as Asian, the next step, to now coming up with common voices across ethnic groups."

The new program marks an expansion at APALI, which already offers a youth leadership academy, public service training and a Senior Fellows program for Asian-Americans.

Chang was elected in 1997 as the first Asian-American mayor of Cupertino, a town that has moved from majority white to roughly half Asian during the past 20 years. Abrica is the first Latino mayor of East Palo Alto, which moved from majority black to majority Latino in roughly the same period.

The dynamics of integrating

the old and new power structures have been virtually the same in the two cities, even though they differ in income and education levels.

Bones of contention

In Cupertino, white and Asian residents have sparred over issues from Chinese-language signs on businesses to putting an Asian donor's name on a public library. In East Palo Alto, black and Latino residents have split along racial lines over board appointments and affordable-housing slots. Asian and Latino immigrants in both communities have been criticized for not getting involved in their neighborhoods or schools.

"There's a misunderstanding between immigrants and institutions," Abrica said. "Immigrant communities participate, but they're under the radar. They're not recognized."

The challenge for APALI to expand to Latinos was originally put out by advisory board member Hsing Kung, a high-tech entrepreneur and community leader known as a bridge-builder in Silicon Valley.

"It makes sense," said James Lai, a Santa Clara University political-science professor. "If you work together, people don't see everything as a zero-sum game: 'If we win, you lose.' It's key to the future of California politics."

Kung's idea "took some time to process," said Chang. But ultimately, said Mae Lee, APALI associate director for leadership training, "When we had the conversation philosophically and in the spirit of what APALI has always done, which is work with underrepresented communities, there was no

reason why it didn't make sense."

The program will include speakers, networking, field trips and history and case studies in the two communities. Chang said the program is open to people of any ethnic background who want to learn more about issues in Latino and Asian communities.

At a community meeting last week, Chang invited civic groups, such as Foro Latino and Asian Americans for Community Involvement, to De Anza to introduce the concept and encourage them to enroll candidates.

The commonalities poured forth with little effort.

Tamon Norimoto, who was promoting First Thursdays, a monthly forum for Asian-American concerns, discovered Foro Latino does the same for the Latino community.

The July topic for both groups: immigration.

Norimoto, of the Japanese American Citizens League, and Abrica, a founder of Foro Latino, perked up at the coincidence.

"How do you pronounce your first name?" Abrica asked Norimoto by way of introduction.

"Tah-MONE. Like *jamon* with a 'T,'" Norimoto replied — using the Spanish word for "ham."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

For more information about Civic Leadership for Community Empowerment, contact Michael Chang at changmichael@deanza.edu.

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