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Michael Chang, a former Cupertino mayor, will co-teach a civic leadership and community empowerment class at DeAnza College in January with the mayor of East Palo Alto.

Intercultural civic leadership program to begin in January

By JACK PRENTICE

Michael Chang, a former mayor of Cupertino and executive director for the Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute at De Anza College, and Ruben Abrica, the mayor of East Palo Alto and a Chicano studies professor, have joined to teach a new program that has been described as groundbreaking.

The program marks the first official collaboration between the South Bay's two largest ethnic groups. It is especially appropriate for Santa Clara Valley, Chang believes, because the Asian and Latino communities make up two-thirds of the population but have far fewer elected leaders.

The goal of the program is "to encourage more Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans to become involved in civic and community participation," says Chang. "We want to use our network to help them fulfill their ambition."

Both Abrica and Chang have been instrumental in achieving greater representation of their own ethnic communities in local politics. Now, the two have decided to come together and teach a seminar through APALI that will educate emerging Latino and Asian American leaders in public policy and community issues.

The De Anza-based Civic Leadership for Community Empowerment program will start in January with a class of 25 students and will focus on preparing Asian and Latino young professionals, community volunteers, and college students for leadership opportunities in nonprofit organizations, government-appointed boards and commissions, and local elected office.

The 10-week program will be run in a small seminar format and include expert guest speakers, field trips and exploration of the history of Asian

Americans and Latinos in order to gain an understanding of community development and improve intercultural communication. Contemporary issues that affect these communities, such as immigration reform, will be analyzed and discussed as well as the effects of public policies already in place.

As a major sponsor, Comerica Foundation has provided \$10,000 in seed money. President and CEO of Comerica's western market J. Michael Fulton explained the foundation's desire to fund the program by saying, "We want to get involved with youth leadership. This program has been a bull's-eye for us." He made these remarks at a press conference during APALI's annual civic leadership and graduation dinner, which drew more than 450 registered guests.

The pilot class for the program ran in 2000, and graduates have increased their civic involvement just as the program was designed to encourage them to do.

Cupertino councilman and former mayor Patrick Kwok was a graduate of the pilot program, as was Gap Kim, who ran for Santa Clara City Council and currently is a manager at Google. Asked what he took away from the pilot program, Kim said, "While it was clear to me that many of us were strangers who once came from different shores, here we were a community. The class helped me strengthen my commitment to that community." Another graduate of the pilot program, Buu Thai—now Karyn Sinunu's campaign manager in her bid for district attorney—said the experience "gave me the courage to speak up about injustices rather than sitting on the sideline. If I wanted to see change happen, then it has to start with me."

For more information on joining the program, visit www.svapali.org in September or contact Michael Chang at changmichael@deanza.edu.