

## **HISTORY & SOCIETY**

## Vietnamese-American Community Welcomes the New Year

Connie K. Ho | March 17, 2015

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year's program was "The Return of Golden Harvest" and thousands, from Greater Los Angeles and Orange County, flocked to the park to take part in the festivities. The festival is just one component of the multi-faceted Vietnamese community in El Monte and South El Monte. Hosted this past month, the weekend-long program included firecrackers, a fashion show, games and other activities.



together." The first Tet celebration was in held in 2003 to promote Vietnamese cultural traditions.

through food, music and cultural activities. It is a good opportunity for family members to get



community as a whole to reflect upon the past and look forward to blessings in the future," said

Nguyen.

community.

lens.

In the center of the park, a stage was set up for a variety of performances, including traditional dances and live music. "The Vietnamese music that was presented is often poetic or patriotic," Nguyen said. "Songs are often reflective of love for family, friends, community and country."

Korean barbeque wafted across the field as attendees sipped on boba drinks and noshed on delectable finger foods. Booth upon booth served up special dishes, including house special porridge, noodles, and rice cakes.

Food was also a big part of the festival with a range of culinary styles on display. The aroma of



Vietnamese American Kenneth Nguyen, a local business owner, has seen the change in demographics. He attended Don Bosco Tech in Rosemead in the 1970s and now lives in Alhambra. Growing up in the San Gabriel Valley, he was surrounded by a predominantly white and Latino

"Asian kids growing up at that time weren't the majority and, not being the majority, it was a little hard having to deal with bullying and being pushed around," Nguyen said. "I have definitely seen the shift in San Gabriel, Monterey Park, Alhambra area - there's been a huge push of Chinese people which wasn't like that when I was growing up." These days, he has friends from all walks of life and doesn't aim to distinguish them through a racial

"In the early days, when I was growing up in the 70s and 80s, I kind of had to choose," said Nguyen on defining Asian American identities. "I feel like it's no longer like that for Asian kids - they have a

healthy sense of being Asian American, full on American, not biased the way I had it when I was growing up." Vinh Nguyen, pastor of El Monte Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church, has also noticed the shifts in the Vietnamese community in El Monte and South El Monte over the past few years. His church aims to provide services for immigrants with a Vietnamese language school and a community

health fair. His organization also offers services in English and Vietnamese, attracting both new immigrants and those who were born in the U.S. According to an ethnographic guide on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Vietnamese have immigrated and resettled to other countries. In the U.S., this was marked by the 1975-era refugees,

the "boat people" and minority groups (including Ameriasians and ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese).

Festival is an opportunity for thousands to come together to appreciate Vietnamese culture, pay tribute to the ancestors and welcome the New Year.

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And while Vietnamese cuisine attracts culinary explorers like Chaplin into the area, the L.A. Tet

"My favorite restaurant is Kim Hoa Hue, a low-key place specializing in Central Vietnamese fare.

The baby clam rice (com hen) is especially noteworthy," Chaplin said.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** 

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Today, El Monte and South El Monte, offers an abundance of services and businesses that cater to the Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American community and has sprouted numerous noteworthy Vietnamese restaurants, particularly along Garvey Ave. According to Cathy Chaplin, a food writer who pens the blog "Gastronomy," there are more and more restaurants with Vietnamese cuisine in the area. She first became acquainted with this culinary hub when a new job in the area prompted her lunchtime explorations of El Monte. "I can't attest to what the neighborhood used to be like, but the stretch of Garvey starting at Walnut Grove heading east is a current hotbed for Vietnamese restaurants," said Chaplin, a Vietnamese-American based in Pasadena. Chaplin ventures to the Vietnamese restaurants along Garvey for lunch as often as she can.

Celebration of cultural heritage and welcoming the New Year. Photo by Connie Ho.



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