

# South Land Park native appointed to state Asian, Pacific Islander commission

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By Lance Armstrong

Dr. David Yee, a native of South Land Park and a sixth generation Californian, is among the newest commissioners of the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs. He was appointed as a commissioner by Gov. Gavin Newsom, and sworn into that position by State Controller Betty Yee during a ceremony at the state Capitol on April 23.

The mission of this commission is to raise “the political, economic and social issues of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by contributing to and strengthening how state government addresses the needs, issues and concerns of the diverse and complex Asian American and Pacific Islander American communities.”

Yee, who is a urologist, spoke to this publication last week about his recent swearing in to this position.

“It’s my honor to be a part of this (commission),” he said. “I was very thankful, appreciative and in awe of the moment.

“I felt this commission would be an opportunity to serve in this capacity (with) my interest in this particular field, with my background in medicine, public health and high school and college journalism; that I could really help in this regard.



Attending the ceremony with Yee was his wife, Kathy, and his children, Sarah, Samantha and Henry.

Yee has a history of being active in various circles in the Sacramento area, having worked professionally at Sutter Memorial Hospital in East Sacramento, and attended the Chinese Grace Bible Church in the Pocket area. He was also a member of the now-defunct Southside Improvement Club, and he is a current member of Del Paso Country Club.

He currently serves as a board member of the Yee Fong Toy family association, and he is a member of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Association.

Yee also serves as a physician mentor and volunteer at the Paul Hom Asian Clinic, and he is on the clinical faculty of both the University of California, Davis School of Medicine and the California Northstate University College of Medicine.



His educational background includes graduating from C.K. McClatchy High School, completing medical school at the University of California, Davis, and earning a master's degree in public health from the University of California, Berkeley.

In his professional life, Yee serves as the director of the Urology and Genitourinary Oncology Services at Sutter Roseville Medical Center and is a principal investigator of prostate cancer clinical trials at Sutter Health. He additionally serves on multiple medical boards. Yee was also an advocate for the state's recent three-year, \$166.5 million investment in the Asian, Pacific Islander community. Those funds provide resources in response to increases in Asian hate, and address racial inequities in that community.

In helping to emphasize the importance of his new, state position, Yee noted that one in every six Californians are of Asian descent.

Yee highlighted some of the historical contributions made by Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.

“From building the transcontinental railroad, developing farmlands, forming civic infrastructure, and defending our nation, our forefathers have shaped and lived the American dream,” he said. “It is our duty to share their stories in our schools and to continue to build on the solid foundation that they have provided.”

Yee told this publication that he was appointed to the Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs partially based on his interest in Asian, Pacific Islander American history, and his background in volunteerism and other community service.

For Yee, learning about Chinese history – in particular his family heritage – has been an important part of his life since his childhood.



His mentor for learning about his family’s history was his grandfather, Dr. Herbert Yee, who attended Sacramento’s schools in his youth and later became a well-known dentist, philanthropist, and historian of his family’s history.





“I spent a lot of time with grandpa,” Dr. David Yee said. “He always encouraged us to learn about our heritage, to support our heritage,” he said. “He took me to Fiddletown, which was kind of fascinating. It’s a real time capsule into the mid-19th century.”

Yee has a direct connection to Fiddletown, as his great-great-great grandfather, Dr. Yee Fung Cheung, operated his practice and had an herb store there during the Gold Rush. Herbert, who died last year, graduated as a dental surgeon from Stanford University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1948, and set an example for many of his family members who sought higher education and professional careers.

Dr. David Yee mentioned that the timing of his appointment presented a nice transition into Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, which has been celebrated in the United States each May since 2009.

“May was chosen (for that celebration), because that’s when the first-known Japanese immigrant to the U.S. arrived, on May 7, 1843,” he said. “It also kind of commemorates the completion of the (first) transcontinental railroad, which was finished on May 10, 1869. Twenty thousand Chinese workers participated in the (construction of) the railroad.”

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is additionally special to Yee, considering that this monthlong celebration was inspired by one of his relatives.

“It was actually my Aunt Jeanie on my mom’s side,” he said. “Her name is Jeanie Jew. (She) was a former Capitol Hill staffer that had experienced the U.S. bicentennial celebration in 1976. She was concerned about the lack of recognition given to Asian, Pacific (Islander) Americans.



“At that time, there was already Black History Month. There was also Spanish Heritage Week. But there was really nothing to commemorate Asian, Pacific Islander contributions to the United States. She worked with her congressman, Frank Horton, and over time they were able to get initially a week (celebration in 1978), and then followed by a month (long celebration).” Also instrumental in establishing Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month was the late Norman Mineta, former U.S. secretary of transportation.

Moving forward as a commissioner of the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, Yee expressed excitement for his new role.

“As a commissioner, it is my hope to continue my family’s long history of service to our state and to advise our elected officials in crafting effective policy addressing the concerns of the state’s Asian and Pacific Islander American communities,” he said. “I think that’s incredibly important.”