



THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF HAWAII

夏威夷中華總商會



LANTERN

NEWSLETTER

Jan & Feb, 2022

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Upcoming Events

After a one-year absence due to the pandemic, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce will again be presenting the Narcissus Pageant. The date is Saturday, April 2, and the Pageant will be held at the Mamiya Theatre on the St. Louis School campus. Then on Saturday, April 23, the Narcissus Coronation Banquet will be held at the Jade Dynast Seafood Restaurant. For more information and to purchase tickets for either or both events, call **Tina** at 808-533-3181.

COVID-19 update

Early in February, the CDC recommended that people switch from cloth or even “surgical” masks to N95/KN95/FC94 masks, which offer more protection against the highly transmissible Omicron variant that is now dominant in the U.S. While the Omicron surge seems to be diminishing, with so many Americans unvaccinated/unboosted, 2021 showed that there is a risk of one or more variants appearing (in late February this year, a BA.2 Omicron subvariant was detected), so it is worth having the best protection available, at home or in your car, even though the Hawaii mask mandate will be lifted by Saturday, March 26. (Ironically, the 50th state was the last state to do so).

While the more protective masks can be pricey, they can be reused multiple times, if handled carefully. **Joshua Sargent** had an article in the Jan. 21 SFGate.com, “How long will your three free N95 masks last?” along with other mask information. And speaking of “free,” the U.S. government is once again offering four free rapid test kits per household, and if you missed out the first time, you can submit two orders for a total of eight for your household. **Kyrstin Arneson** had an article, “PRC vs. antigen testing: what’s the difference and what should you buy?” in the Jan. 11 SFGate.com if you want to know what the differences are between available tests. (The free tests are rapid antigen tests). In addition to ordering online, there is also a hotline: 800-232-0233.

Of course the best protection is the readily available (and often free) vaccines, especially for older Americans. (Clinical data shows that older Americans – those over 50 years of age – benefited more from the vaccines/boosters than younger Americans while

the data is still being evaluated for children from 5-11 years of age). The data also shows that the chance of those who have had a booster shot have a one in one million chance of dying, about the same as getting hit by a motor vehicle. So with the quite likely undercounted death toll (due to overwhelmed medical facilities in early 2020 not being able to conduct post-mortem tests) closing in on a mind-boggling one million (currently 966,059), do you really want to take a chance that you or one of your loved ones is added to that toll? And the latest news is that there is an Omicron BA.2 subvariant as well as a combined “deltachron” variant – a recombinant of the Delta and Omicron variants as well; neither are currently concerning health experts. For those who want more information, *USA Today’s Jen Christensen* has lengthy articles of the apparent end of the Omicron surge (Mar. 5) and what could lie ahead in 2022 (Mar. 13).





President
Russell Lau

Your Chamber has been hard at work this year. We have continued to deal with the pandemic along with having to finish the cleaning of our building's basement due to the December and January rains that leaked into our basement. Nevertheless, your intrepid Chamber has taken on the challenges and moved our agendas forward.

From a business outreach effort, **Michael Young** organized Dr. **Eugene Tian**, the State of Hawaii's chief economist, who gave a virtual presentation on Hawaii's COVID Economy on January 19. This well attended event provided valuable information regarding the impacts that COVID has had on Hawaii businesses and the tourism industry. Then on February 10, Mike coordinated another webinar "Hawaii Small Businesses Surviving COVID", with **Cynthia Yamasaki** and **Zach Oliver**, as the guest speakers. On February 11, I talked with **Liberty Greep**, a UH student contracted by Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), to talk about Chinatown initiatives and their impact on the community. LISC is a very prestigious national non-profit that tries to connect community groups with public and private resources.

From a community outreach effort, the Chamber provided much assistance to the Congressional Gold Medal event, which was held on February 6. To name just a few of the volunteers from the

Chamber, they were **Michele Choy**, **Joseph Hu**, **Jeff Lau**, **Walter Chang**, MG (Ret.) **Robert Lee**, MG (Ret.) **Stephen Tom**, and MG (Ret.) **Darryll Wong**. I know there were many other volunteers, but we want to thank all of them for their efforts to ensure the Chinese American veterans from WWII were properly recognized. The Chamber also was used as a central location for the fundraising efforts, the storing and selling of the special Reyn Spooner shirts, and the Chamber donated over 800 "Celebrating 100 Years of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce Hawaii" anniversary books. (We need to thank the many volunteers for moving the books from the Chamber basement to the Hilton Hawaiian Village, as the books were very heavy.)

On February 24, several members of the Executive Committee held a virtual meeting with Congressman **Ed Case** to discuss issues of importance for the Chinese Chamber. Ed was truly interested in what we had to say, including matters dealing with the military and the Navy's Bulk Fuel Storage Facility at Red Hill.

Then on February 26, our Chamber's Chinatown Outreach Task Force held another Saturday clean-up and paint-out in conjunction with the Honolulu Police Department and the Weed and Seed Program. We had a lot of volunteers and were able to finish our work in record time. We received valuable media exposure for this event in TV and newspaper coverage.

Frances Goo has been working very hard on the Personnel Committee of the Chamber and has been searching for a replacement for our retiring Executive Vice President **Wen Chung Lin**. Her committee has worked hard and has agreed to recommend to the Executive Committee and the full board a suitable replacement. Hopefully the candidate will be approved later this month.

We also want to thank **Eddie Flores** for promoting Chinese culture with his efforts to build Chinatown gateway arches, honoring 14 individuals who made significant contributions to the Chinese community and Chinatown. Central Pacific Bank hosted an event in their lobby on February 22. I am proud to say that one of them, **Connie Lau**, just happens to be my wife. I guess that will forever keep me humble and in my place.

On other news, we are planning on holding our much delayed 72nd Narcissus Pageant on Saturday, April 2, and the Coronation Ball on Saturday, April 23. While they will be slightly downsized from our "normal" activities, we will still have a lot of fun at these events. As usual, we are lucky to have Michele Choy spearhead these difficult and time-consuming events.

I strongly urge everyone to help support our efforts by purchasing tickets and tables for both the Pageant and Coronation Ball. It is so very important for these two events to be successful to ensure the Chamber can continue to provide the quality of cultural and business education for our community. The pandemic has prevented us from doing a lot, but we have still been helping to clean up Chinatown and we want to continue to give back. Please help us!

Elvira Lo is putting the finishing touches on her planned Narcissus Goodwill Tour to Vancouver, Canada. Her plan is to take the 71st Narcissus Queen Court on this special tour as we are still unable to get into China and really have no idea when it will be open for visitors. Please wait for more details to emerge.

Lastly, there is exciting news for Chinatown as the River of Life Mission will be moving out to the City of Honolulu's building in Iwilei. We anticipate that the number of problems associated with the homeless in Chinatown will diminish with this departure.

Congratulations

from Finance Factors to the
Chinese Chamber of Commerce
of Hawai'i, and to all those participating
in this year's Narcissus Festival.

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本屆水仙花節慶會及所有參與者



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We proudly support the
Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii
and its annual Narcissus Festival.

Best wishes to all the participants and
continued success to the Chamber for
its contributions to the community.

Russell J. Lau,
Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii President,
and Connie Lau, Jen Lau, Rob Nelson, Greg Lau, Eric Lau,
grandson Blake Lau Nelson and granddaughter Sloane Lau Nelson





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CONGRATULATIONS

to all the participants of the
72nd Annual Narcissus Festival

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and this celebration of Chinese culture in our community.

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Economic Forecast 2022

Feb. 1 marked the start of a Year of the Tiger. Two weeks later, and eastern Europe is in an uproar, Ukrainian civilians are being subjected to war crimes or crimes against humanity, with outlawed Russian cluster munitions and indiscriminate artillery and aerial bombings, and the former KGB colonel in the Kremlin is isolated and head of an unimpressive military. With increasing economic sanctions aimed at Pres. Putin and his ultrarich kleptocratic oligarchs, the Russian *ruble* has crashed, the Russian economy is in shambles with sovereign debt default increasingly likely, and Moody's and Fitch downgrading Russian bonds to junk bond status.

Outside Russia, Western governments are taking steps against Russian fossil fuels, depending on their particular supply needs. While Russia supplies about 40% of the European Union's natural gas and 25% of its oil, the EU announced plans on Mar. 8 to cut gas imports by two-thirds by the end of 2022, and then on Mar. 11 announced plans to end reliance on all Russian fossil fuels by 2027. Meanwhile, on Mar. 8, Pres. Joe Biden signed an executive order banning U.S. import of Russian fossil fuels, which account for only about 10% of U.S. oil imports, and the following day, the House overwhelmingly passed the Ban Russian Energy Import Act by a 414-17 vote. Of note, at least in the short term, polls by Quinnipiac University and others show that large majorities (71%) of Americans support banning Russian fossil fuels even if it means paying more at the gas pump.

(Gas has been one sign of inflation locally, and for those of you wanting to pay as little as possible to power your vehicle, there's GasBuddy Honolulu – www.honolulugasbuddy.com – to help locate some relatively inexpensive gas near you.)

Meanwhile, in the U.S., since mid-January 2021, the U.S. economy has been surprisingly strong, and despite “transitory” inflation hanging on longer than Fed Chair **Jerome Powell** and Treasury Secretary **Janet Yellen** expected, Americans are still spending on goods, in contrast to pre-pandemic spending on services. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in January, consumer spending was up 2.1% over December. Also, back in March 2020, some 22 million Americans lost their jobs due to the pandemic, yet recovery since then has been amazingly fast, with a historic, record number of jobs – 6.6 million – created since Pres. Biden took office in January, 2021. It is estimated that the pre-pandemic job level will be reached by mid-2022; in contrast, it took 10 years for jobs to recover from the great financial crisis of 2007-2008.

Locally, there is good and bad news. According to the March 6 *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization (UHERO) reports that mainland tourist bookings have bounced back to pre-pandemic levels while Asian tourist bookings are flat, seemingly due to new outbreaks of the coronavirus in South Korea, Hong Kong, and even “zero-

COVID” China. (The latest is the Mar. 13 news that Shenzhen, a city of 175 million, would be shut down for a week). A week earlier, the State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) had also produced an optimistic forecast for 2022. However, one wonders whether the two state agencies, like the tourism *honchos* in Waikiki, are still living in the past of the mythical “free-spending Japanese” of several decades ago when in recent years, it has been the Chinese who stay longer and spend more per day, hence are the real “big-spenders.”

As some of you who pay attention to local Hawaii politics know, the state legislature is in session until Thursday, May 5. Presumably before then, the Lege will have passed a minimum wage bill; currently the schedule for reaching \$18.00 is either 1/1/26 (SB 2018) or 1/1/28 (HB 2510). By way of context, the Hawaii minimum wage has been a princely \$10.10 since 2018 in a locale which is among the priciest in the U.S. For further context, according to **Nick Hanauer** and the members of the “Patriotic Millionaires,” who think that rich people like them should pay MORE taxes, “low-wage workers make up 44% of the U.S. work force.” And perhaps the big business members of the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii should make use of the MIT Living Wage Calculator (<https://livingwage.mit.edu>), clicking on “Urban Honolulu” for the figures for singles, adults (1 working), and adults (both working) with up to 3 children and the living, poverty, and minimum wages. It may open their eyes when comparing the numbers to what they pay their employees.

Chinatown News

As Russell has pointed out in his President's Message, the Institute for Human Services is shifting its operations to Iwilei. That may mean fewer homeless people (as well as substance abusers and mental cases) in Chinatown and may also mean an increase in residents and tourists stopping to shop or dine in Chinatown. Complementing that news is an announcement from Sen. **Brian Schatz** regarding the recently signed \$1.5 trillion “omnibus spending package,” funding federal government operations for the remainder of FY 2022, which ends on September 30. Included in the “member-directed spending” (or “pork”) by Sen. Schatz is \$3.5 million for the City and County of Honolulu to “support the establishment a Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement (C.O.R.E.) program to divert 911 calls regarding non-violent unhoused people to a trained crisis outreach staff that can focus on providing resources, assistance, and shelter.” A model that the City can take a look at is the Denver “Support Team Assisted Response” or STAR program, instituted in June 2020. Instead of dispatching police, a two-member team of mental health experts and paramedics in vans respond. Similar services have been started up in other Colorado cities, including Colorado Springs, Ft. Collins, and Pueblo.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 4 • Fri

General Election of Board of Directors

Mar 22 • Tue

Executive Committee Meeting

Chamber Office – 6:00 p.m.

Mar 25 • Fri

Election of 2022-2023 New Officers

Mar 29 • Tue

Board of Directors Meeting

Google Virtual Meet – 12:00 p.m.

Apr 2 • Sat

72nd Narcissus Queen Pageant

Mamiya Theatre – 6:30 p.m.

Apr 20 • Wed

Executive Committee Meeting

Finance Factors Building – 6:00 p.m.

Apr 23 • Sat

72nd Narcissus Coronation Banquet

Jade Dynasty Seafood Restaurant

– 5:30 p.m.

Apr 26 • Tue

Board of Directors Meeting

Simply Sichuan – 12:00 p.m.

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Member News

“Walking off the war” is one way combat veterans have of dealing with PTSD, according to VoteVets. In the recently passed FY 2022 National Defense Appropriation Act (NDAA), there is a provision that all veterans and Gold Star families are now entitled to FREE entry to any of our national parks. (FYI, there are a handful of older Chamber members who are “Vietnam era” veterans who began their service to the country during the years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam – 1965-1975 – and even one who served in Vietnam). The only Vietnam veteran and Chamber member is none other than **Wesley Fong**. Wes deployed to Vietnam as a Medical Services Corps officer, not a Judge Advocate officer. His paperback book, *Memoirs of a Chinese American Officer*, is available online from Amazon and Barnes & Noble for \$12.95. Wes will probably be more than happy to autograph your copy of his book.

Elisia Flores is emulating her father, Eddie, who was often mentioned in successive Lantern issues’ Member News. This issue, she (and two other Honolulu businesswomen) is being honored by the Girl Scouts of Hawaii as one of three 2022 Women of Distinction at a dinner on Friday, March 11. The brief mention in the Feb. 17 *Star-Advertiser*’s “On the Move” column said that she is “vice chair and chief executive officer of L&L Franchise Inc. Managing the direction of 200 restaurants across the U.S. and Japan.” (In comparison, the November announcement that Elisia had been named to the HEI board of directors listed an impressive number of community organizations that she donates her time and efforts to).

McDonald’s franchisee **Victor Lim** is a former president of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce as well as the United Chinese Society and the Lum Sai Ho Tong. He is one of six inductees in the Hawaii Restaurant Association’s 2022 Hall of Fame class, “select individuals who have demonstrated dedication and commitment to the growth of the restaurant and food service industry in Hawaii, contributed to the enhancement of its quality and image, and demonstrated service through outreach.” The HRA will be holding a dinner on Monday, February 28 at the Sheraton Waikiki Ballroom: The 14th annual Hall of Fame Inductees and “Chefs of Aloha” Dine Around will include a number of serving stations for guests to spend well over an hour sampling food from some of the top restaurants in Hawaii as well as the Hall of Fame program. Congratulations, Victor, on the well-deserved honor.



THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF HAWAII

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