

# April 2021



*FAPAC-DOI Newsletter*



# *In this issue*

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*Cherry trees near Washington Monument.  
Photo: National Park Service*

# *From the president*

Dear FAPAC-DOI,

I hope you have all been doing well and taking care of yourselves. I recently took some time to enjoy doing what I love, with people I love, on the public lands that we love! It was much needed; I know it is often not easy to put the bustle of work and life aside for self-care, but it is so important for our mental, emotional, and even professional well-being. I hope you are continuing to find ways to prioritize yourselves and your loved ones.

In the past months and year, we have shared hard stories and received incredible support from DOI, including a listening session with Erica White-Dunston and Tanisha Edmonds of the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights, and a roundtable discussion with Secretary Deb Haaland.

On behalf of FAPAC-DOI, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Secretary Haaland and her staff, Jennifer Van Der Heide, Mili Gosar, and Melissa Schwartz, for reaching out to our chapter and ODICR to organize and hold a powerful roundtable discussion with the Asian American Pacific Islander community. Thank you for seeing us, hearing us, and supporting us. We feel the energy and positive momentum and can see a brighter horizon emerging from these conversations. Thank you to all of you who have been a part of it.

We are in this together.

Stay well,



Lena Chang  
President, FAPAC-DOI



*Limekiln Canyon, Arizona  
Photo courtesy of Yöli Chen*

# Member spotlight

## Janet Cushing

Deputy Chief, National Climate Adaptation Science Center  
U.S. Geological Survey

My parents met on blind-date in Japan; he was an American stationed at an Air Force Base and my mom at the time was a midwife in Osaka. They married, and eventually settled in New York after my dad retired from the Air Force. Although I was born and raised on Long Island, I've worked and lived in many places: Pasadena, CA; Honolulu, HI; Chicago, IL; Jacksonville, FL; and for the last 16 years, in Reston, VA.

I'm a proud civil servant, having worked for the federal government for about 23 years. I started out working as an Asst. Natural

Resources Manager at Jacksonville Naval Air Station, which fostered a love of applying science to resource management questions. I'm blessed to have had an interesting career journey thus far, going from the Navy to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, first on the Regulatory side, inspecting wetland mitigation sites and working on Clean Water Act violations, then to the Planning side working on Everglades restoration; to the U.S. Geological Survey, Fisheries Program; back to the Army Corps at the Institute for Water Resources (a "think tank" where I worked on emerging issues like climate change and ecosystem goods and services); and then back to USGS.

Currently, I help provide oversight for the National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers, managing the administrative side of the house and engaging with government and non-government partners. In each position, I've been keenly interested in building relationships with others and try to maintain a sense of curiosity about people's different perspectives. I attribute this to my multi-cultural heritage and upbringing. I grew up knowing that I was different from most kids in my school (there were very, very few Asian-Americans), and while I loved the Japanese side of me, I also greatly desired to "fit in" with the other kids; and so I observed and learned about those around me. Oddly enough, it wasn't until I moved to Hawai'i for grad school and found myself as part of the "majority" population that I realized I rather liked being "different." I also found my voice for expressing my multi-cultural perspectives.

And this leads me to express my gratitude for FAPAC; I am grateful to be a member of FAPAC and for being a part of an organization where I can build relationships with others of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage, to share stories, and learn and grow together.



# *My perfect pandemic pastime*

## Barbara Green

Equal Opportunity Manager

National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office

I have a crush on Daniel Dae Kim (DDK). Let's get real here. Have you seen those chiseled cheekbones? During the pandemic, I knew I needed to temper my malasadas addiction and divert my attention elsewhere, so I thought I would search for a new show to binge watch. Lo and behold, I read the premise for NBC's *New Amsterdam* and decided to check it out. The show is based on Dr. Eric Manheimer's book, *Twelve Patients: Life and Death at Bellevue Hospital*, and centers around Ryan Eggold's character, Dr. Max Goodwin, a medical director at one of the United States' oldest hospitals as he tries to reform it by cutting through bureaucratic red tape in his quest to provide exceptional patient care.



*Freema Agyeman, Daniel Dae Kim, and Ryan Eggold*  
Photo: TVInsider.com

I became hooked after the first episode; the characters are compelling and the storylines are riveting. Towards the end of the second season, Kim's character, Dr. Cassian Shin, distinguished the show with his magnificent presence, portraying a new trauma surgeon. My, oh my, forget "McDreamy" and "McSteamy" from *Grey's Anatomy*...*New Amsterdam* has whom I refer to as "McHottie," because that man is hotter than the spiciest kimchee imaginable.

More importantly, Daniel Dae Kim is one of our staunchest advocates in fighting against Asian American hate crimes. As he so eloquently testified before Congress, Kim said, *"There are several moments in a country's history that chart its course indelibly for the future. For Asian Americans, that moment is now. What happens right now and over the course of the coming months will send a message for generations to come as to whether we matter; whether the country we call home chooses to erase us or include us, dismiss us or respect us, 'invisibilize' us or see us, because you may consider*

*us as statistically insignificant now, but one more fact that has no alternative is that we are the fastest growing racial demographic in the country. We are 23 million strong. We are united, and we are waking up.”* Preach, DDK, preach.

It is long overdue to have an Asian man portray a strong confident character on television, who is not relegated to a stereotypical bit part. From acting in movies, and in the television, shows *Lost* and *Hawaii Five-O*, to producing and acting in the *Good Doctor*, and now, gracing us with his presence in his recurring role on *New Amsterdam*, I applaud him for breaking boundaries by becoming the first Asian American actor to sign a production deal with CBS after he formed his film and television production company, 3AD.

I am also excited to see *New Amsterdam* exploring a romantic relationship between Dr. Shin, and Freema Agyeman’s portrayal of Dr. Helen Sharpe, because those two sizzle and have palpable chemistry. And I love the thought of an Asian man involved in a romance with one of the lead characters. I want to thank my birth country for bestowing us with such a charismatic, intelligent, articulate and handsome man, who I am enamored with, along with a man of such remarkable character and integrity, who will speak up and stand up for what is right and just, in his critical and much needed role as an Asian American activist.

Did I happen to mention his chiseled cheekbones?

# On being first

**(April 2021)** - On March 11, 2021, Nicole Yamase, a University of Hawai'i student from Pohnpei became the first Pacific Islander to descend into the Challenger Deep, 36,000 feet below sea-level, the deepest spot on earth. In an [interview](#) following her expedition, she spoke of not being afraid to be the “first” and shared a story with which I could identify.



*Nicole Yamase ([The Guardian](#))*

I also grew up on Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, a former Trust Territory of the United States. My cousins and I would go swimming all the time - in the ocean, rivers, and waterfalls - rain or shine! But when we first came to the edge of the water, there was something about needing someone to go first. We would all line up looking at the water coaxing someone else to make the first jump. We would be shouting, “You go, no you! You!” This usually went on for a minute or two, but once the first kid jumped, another would soon follow, and then another, and then another. Before you knew it, all the kids would be swimming and enjoying the water, but we always needed that “first” to get things moving.



*AAPI Roundtable with the Secretary (Lena, Kelly, Thomas, Tanya, Secretary Haaland). Photo courtesy of FAPAC and Dou-Shuan Yang*

On Friday, April 16, I shared some of my own experiences as an American Pacific Islander at an Interior Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Roundtable. It was convened by the [Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights](#) and [FAPAC-DOI](#) at the request of Secretary Debra Haaland and her team to address the increase in anti-AAPI discrimination and racism. Kelly Sewell of the

Office of Human Capital, Thomas Liu of the Bureau of Ocean Energy and Management, and myself from the Office of Insular Affairs, participated with Lena Chang of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service moderating.

Having Secretary Haaland as the first Native American woman to head the Department is historic and symbolic. That she would spend time to address the AAPI panel was hopeful. It was an important first step towards inspiring better allyship, more awareness, courtesy, and hopefully respect for one another.

There is a Pohnpeian saying that goes something like this: ‘*Sapwaniki aramas mwahusang sapwaniki sahpw*’, which means to say that relationships with people are more important than owning land. To Pacific Islanders, land is an extremely limited resource, and is the basis for their very livelihood. The land is life itself. So, to say that people are more important than land is saying something.

The following week, on April 21, following the verdict rendered in Minneapolis, Secretary Haaland released a statement on the [Path Ahead for Racial Equity](#). We are in this together and must support one another. *Kalahngan en Komwi Maing* Secretary.

*By Tanya Harris Joshua, Deputy Policy Director and Communications Lead, Office of Insular Affairs. Any opinions expressed are my own.*



# *Farewell to DOI*

## Thao Tran

First President of FAPAC-DOI

Department of Interior > Department of State

For far too long, my story has contributed to the model minority myth. I immigrated to the United States at a young age, marking myself as part of the 1.5 generation of that often grappled with the Vietnamese traditions of the old world and the American values of the new world. While we were fortunate to have family members already established in Texas, my family and I arrived with little to call our own and limited ability to communicate in English. Through my parents' commitment to create a better life for our family, I have benefited from the privilege of being the first to graduate from college in the United States, travel the world representing the federal government as Foreign Service Officer, and most recently – complete DOI's Senior Executive Service Career Development Program.



It comes as no surprise, then, that I am proud of all that we have accomplished. On paper, it is far too easy to characterize our journey towards the “American Dream” as the outcome of hard work and dedication. But what gets lost in the success are the pains that we are quick to dismiss, justify, or simply hide away. Beyond the veneer of success, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have experienced hate incidents and microaggressions that have often gone unreported, and the silence does not lessen the distress, hurt, and fear that we as a community are processing through right now.

As a child, I spent most days anxious of the encounters I would experience daily at school simply because I was still learning a new language – among other bullying activity, the other kids chased me, yanked my hair, spit on my head, and ridiculed me for my accent. The behaviors were attributed to kids being kids, yet I always wondered why no one spoke to them or their parents about acceptance and empathy. Instead, I internalized these experiences as areas I needed to improve in myself, and I quickly learned to stay quiet and move on. As my English improved, instead of being praised for bilingual abilities, I was reminded that I pronounced my “d” too hard, and the slight accent I carried became thicker during moments of frustration.

This continued throughout my professional career. Although I held diplomatic status overseas as a Foreign Service Officer, I was repeatedly questioned for never fitting the image they had of what an American looked like. If I stood next to a white, male colleague, both American and foreign peers automatically assumed I was either the wife or the prostitute. By myself, I was instead called exotic or lucky. One time, an American business owner of a restaurant I frequented got upset at me for a factual statement made

about the election that did not align with his political preference. In the midst of his anger, he barked at me, “I probably shot your grandma in Vietnam, so who are you to have an opinion?”

As much as I take pride in my background, to others, it is a weakness that can be used to hurt and demean. But what stings the most during these instances is that no one else around me spoke up about how wrong it was. Not even me.

I am sharing my story so that those who recognize themselves in these experiences know that we are in this together. The increase in violence against AAPIs over the past year has affirmed to me that we need to use our voice to advocate for change – both for ourselves and for other communities of color. No one should be made to feel like they don’t belong. Every moment of pride I have for who I am today is accompanied by a moment of sadness that I wish I had found my voice sooner. I hope to do it now by acknowledging my responsibility to speak up, be an ally, and work towards a better, more inclusive and equitable world. I hope you will join me, too.

I am thankful that we have a safe space like FAPAC-DOI to celebrate our accomplishments and support each other through difficult moments. When I first arrived at DOI in 2017, I was encouraged by Kelly Sewell and Olivia Adrian to formally establish our chapter, and I am grateful for their confidence in me. It was my honor and pleasure to serve the organization as President from 2017-2019. Since then, under Lena Chang and Thomas Liu’s leadership, this organization has flourished into a warm and welcoming community that I always look forward to participating, even while working remotely from Germany over the last several months. Although I will be taking a new opportunity with the Department of State, I hope to continue to stay in touch, and I look forward to finding my way back to DOI someday.

Thank you to all past and present officers of FAPAC-DOI for your commitment. Thank you to all of you in FAPAC-DOI for sharing your own stories and inspiring me.

*Thao Tran was the first President of FAPAC-DOI and recently moved on from her position at the DOI's Office of Wildland Fire to join the Department of State to manage public diplomacy programs in Frankfurt, Germany. We are so grateful for Thao's leadership and establishing FAPAC-DOI. All the best, Thao!*

# DEI resources

## Notes from our March 23 Listening Session:

- Silence is deafening. We'd like to have messages sent to leadership encouraging them to address discrimination with their teams.
- It is hard to focus when we're hearing about attacks on the AAPI community. We want to work hard and we love our missions, but there's still a lot of pain, anxiety, and fear present.
- Some are afraid to be in public spaces: we have become hyperattentive to the body language of others and thought about tools for self-defense. We are also afraid on behalf of our loved ones.
- AAPIs have been taught to blend in and stay quiet rather than to engage in conflict. Racism towards our community may not be new, but talking about it and taking action is a change for some. Allyship is powerful!
- We ought to move forward in solidarity. Many do not want to remain silent any longer. How can we turn our fear into action? How do we take a stand against all racialized violence?

## Resources:

### Articles and News

- [Stop Asian Hate: Call to Action](#)
- [Hate Crime Resources](#)
- [Anti-Asian Violence Resources](#)
- [The U.S. Has a History of Linking Disease with Race and Ethnicity](#)
- [In A Role Reversal, Asian Americans Aim to Protect Their Parents from Hate](#)
- [Asian and Asian-American Photographers Show What Love Looks Like](#)
- [Worst Year Ever: The Rise of](#)
- [Asian American Hate Crimes](#)
- [Seuss Works Haven't Kept Up With The Times](#)
- [The Lies We Tell Ourselves About Race](#)
- [Youn Yuh-jung On Her Historic Oscar Nomination](#) (*note: she won!*)
- [Who We Are](#) (National Asian Pacific American Bar Association)

### On Allyship

- [Netflix Culture: Allyship](#)
- [NeuroLeadership Institute](#)

# *Announcements*

## — FAPAC membership —

If you have yet to join FAPAC national or need to renew your national membership, please go to the [FAPAC website](#) and follow the instructions to do so there. If you have any questions, please feel free to email the membership chairs at [membership@fapac.org](mailto:membership@fapac.org)!

## — Congratulations —

Congratulations to our very own Lena Chang and Kelly Sewell for being awarded the FAPAC Civilian Awards for Diversity Excellence! This award recognizes their significant contributions to the advancement and promotion of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Check out the press release [here](#)!

## — 2021 NLTP Registration —

Registration for the 2021 Virtual National Leadership Training Program is now open! The event will take place from May 25 - 27; in addition to training, it also provides the opportunity to register your bureau/office as an Exhibitor and recruit from a diverse audience of public servants, students, and veterans who are also present at the NLTP. Visit the [website](#) to register and learn more!

**Join the FAPAC-DOI email list by reaching out to the FAPAC-DOI board at [fapacboard@ios.doi.gov](mailto:fapacboard@ios.doi.gov)**