

Diversity Affairs Commission (DAC) - Public Engagement Meeting
Thursday, November 4, 2021 • 3:00pm
Zoom Virtual Meeting

***Mission:** "Winnebago County's Diversity Affairs Commission embraces diversity, inclusion, and belonging by bringing the community together to listen to one another, learn together, and encourage our community to act in ways that help people thrive."*

Steering Committee Attendance: Steve Binder Winnebago County Board Supervisor District 13, Mike Norton Winnebago County Board Supervisor District 20, Lateria Garrett DAC Chairperson and Extension Liaison Mandi Dornfeld. **Absent:** Kathryn Noll-Arias, Rodney Frazier

Public Attendance: Guest Speaker Mee Yang, Beth Roberts - Winnebago County Dept of Human Services, Jody Bezio Extension Winnebago County Administrative Associate, 54 other attendees from County Departments/Community

Meeting Minutes & Attendance: Jody Bezio Administrative Associate - Extension Winnebago County

Education (3:00-4:00)

Mee Yang, Board President of the Hmong Service Center, Inc. gave a presentation about the Hmong people. Who are the Hmong People? Where did they come from? Why are they here? Mee shared the history of the Hmong people, talked about her family's personal experience as Hmong refugees and shared personal photos; followed by a Q&A session with the audience.

Mee Yang is a Hmong descendant, born in Laos, escaped to Thailand in 1975 after the Vietnam War. Through refugee programs, Mee and her family resettled in the United States in late 1979. She is married, has 2 sons and 4 daughters.

Mee graduated high school in 1989 and college in 1994 from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance and minor in Economics. As an undergraduate student in the early 1990s, Mee served as the first female president for the Hmong American Student Association, currently known as the Hmong Student Union, founded in 1983 by the first seven Hmong students attended the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

Prior to 2006, Mee worked for the state for nine years. She then teamed up with her husband with their own financial business with Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company serving families throughout the State of Wisconsin in search of financial guidance and protection for the last 30 years.

Aside from a business owner, Mee dedicated her time to the followings.

- Since 2016, serve as the Hmong female Board President for the Hmong Service Center, Inc. and chairing the two annual Hmong/National Memorial and Labor Day Festivals.
- Since 2017, collaborate with local leaders/organizations and the City of Oshkosh to establish the first Unity in Community event that brings community members in celebration of all ethnic backgrounds, and has continued serving on the steering committee since.
- In 2019, served on the Oshkosh Area School District's Facility Advisory Council Committee, reviewing, advising and making recommendations regarding the school facilities for K-12 in Oshkosh.
- 2019-2021, served on the Northeast Wisconsin Hmong Professionals as a board and committee member.
- Since 2019, join the Winnebago County Diversity Affairs/Committee.
- Since 2020, serve on the City of Oshkosh Diversity Equity Inclusion Committee.
- In 2021 - join the ICS Equity Community Ally Academy with the OASD.

In 2019, Mee received the 2019 Hmong Professional of the Year presented by the Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce in Milwaukee.

Discussion: When asked what she thought we could do better for new groups of refugees Mee commented that she believes in her heart that welcoming them with open arms and being friendly is the most important. How you react to them (the look on your face) is what they will notice most. Social and emotional support from friends and neighbors is very important. Money and financial needs can often be taken care of later - the first need is friendly faces.

The Hmong people have been a part of the Oshkosh community for 30+ years...but many times still seem to be their own community within the larger Oshkosh community...the Hmong don't always step outside their own community. Mee commented that it is important to continue to learn about each other and find opportunities to talk to each other.

Respectfully submitted by: Jody Bezio, Administrative Associate Winnebago County Extension