

## Friday Opinuendo: On a dragon's tail, the wonder of diversity and more

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### Preserving an art form

A new website offers lessons in the cultural heritage of our neighbors, while helping preserve the art of Paj Ntaub needlework for future generations of Hmong in Minnesota and beyond.

Two St. Paul-based organizations, the Hmong Cultural Center and the Hmong Archives, have partnered to launch HmongEmbroidery.org. We congratulate them and recommend the site, created with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Asian Pacific Endowment, an affiliate of Minnesota Philanthropy Partners.

The website showcases exhibits of 213 colorful Hmong embroidery pieces included in the collections of both organizations. Exhibits celebrate the ancient script, Paj Ntaub, that became the motifs or symbols used in Hmong embroidery. An interpretative narrative accompanying each item discusses key motifs and symbols -- dragon tail (Zaj/Ko tw zaj), ram's horn (Kub yaj) and mountain (Roob), for example -- as well as needlework techniques Hmong women used to create their art.

The collection also includes tapestry or story cloths that first appeared in the 1980s when the Hmong people lived in refugee camps. The squares -- depicting the war experience and the village life with which the Hmong people once were familiar -- later were adapted for use as tablecloths and other household decorative items.

Hmong embroidery has changed over the years to include Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese and Western influences, the site notes. "When the Hmong first arrived in the United States in the late 1970s, some of the families were initially resettled in Pennsylvania. While residing there, Hmong women learned applique techniques from the Amish community."

Txongpao Lee, executive director of the Hmong Cultural Center, hopes the site will promote knowledge among young Hmong people of an important part of their cultural and artistic heritage -- an art form that's at risk, the site says, because, as times change, the young don't have "the time or opportunity to learn to make Paj Ntaub as their elders once did."

### 'Wonderful diversity'

We congratulate Appeals Court Judge Wilhelmina Wright, named this week to the Minnesota Supreme Court by Gov. Mark Dayton.

Appointment of the former Ramsey County district court judge represents two significant firsts: She is the first state high court appointment for a DFL governor in 20 years and the first African-American woman to serve on the court.

"I stand here on the shoulders of so many who have paved the way for me," she said during the announcement ceremony at the state Capitol, singling out former Justice Rosalie Wahl, the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court, and Justice Alan Page, the state's first African-American on the court. She also thanked longtime civil rights leader Josie Johnson, who attended.

Wright, who has an undergraduate degree from Yale and a law degree from Harvard, will succeed Justice Helen Meyer, who is retiring after 10 years on the court. Wright was appointed to the appeals court in 2002 by Gov.

Jesse Ventura. Before that, on the Ramsey County bench, she said, "I learned the ropes of being a trial judge" and the values she brings to her new office, the Pioneer Press' Bill Salisbury reported.

He quotes Wright's mention that she was inspired by her mother's "sheer determination" to force a Norfolk, Va., school superintendant to desegregate the city's schools long after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the landmark 1954 "Brown v. Board of Education" decision that state laws establishing separate schools for black and white students were unconstitutional. That decision, she said, was critical to her understanding of the law. "Asked why her race and gender are important to the court, she replied, 'I believe that all of our public institutions must reflect the wonderful and beautiful and wide diversity that comes from people with different experiences and different backgrounds.' "

### Filling the basket

Many new-to-St. Paul immigrants and refugees make a Highland Park apartment complex one of their first stops when they get established in the city, Neighborhood House President Armando Camacho told the Pioneer Press. Though many think of Highland as an upper-middle-class neighborhood, they fail to see its pockets of poverty.

Earlier this month, Neighborhood House took over operation of the Francis Basket food shelf, near the Sibley Plaza Shopping Center on West Seventh Street.

The food shelf, which closed in June after serving the community for 20 years, was run by the St. Paul Franciscan Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Angels, an order whose regional center in the neighborhood closed in May.

Neighborhood House received funding from the United Way, the Butler Family Foundation and the Franciscan Sisters, allowing the food shelf to reopen Aug. 10. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet helped secure the partnership with Neighborhood House.

Neighborhood House has the know-how, operating the largest single-site food shelf in Ramsey County and serving more than 2,500 pounds of food daily to more than 9,400 families a year. The Francis Basket food shelf last year provided 61,000 pounds of food to 1,900 households. We're glad it's back.

### Forecast for St. Paul: 'Hot' in January

City officials confirmed this week that the Red Bull Crashed Ice event will return to St. Paul Jan. 24-26.

Last winter, the three-day competition drew an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 enthusiastic fans who got their first glimpse of the "extreme" sport on U.S. soil. They saw more than 100 athletes from around the world skate and jump down a twisting, 1,400-foot-long ice track on the slope of Cathedral Hill.

The event generated an extra \$100,000 in sales taxes during January -- indicating that an extra \$20 million was spent in the city that month, the Pioneer Press reported. We'll give Crashed Ice a warm welcome.

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