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## Hmong Cultural Center Celebrates 23 years

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For 23 years now the Hmong Cultural Center has been the resource for research on Hmong people in the U.S. and Laos. This year in honor of its 23rd anniversary the center also launched its Hmong History Center Library. Hmong Times spoke with Mark Pfeiffer who said that the library remains a research library, but it will lend out some items from its children's collection and video library. "It is a very strong research library," stated Pfeifer. He added that a couple major grants allowed them to buy more material and furniture and "a heavy duty copy machine. It is not a good idea to lend out some of the more rare books." Now there is a good copy machine on site.



The library contains over 300 Master's and PhD dissertations on the Hmong as well as 800 journal articles and over 500 books. Pfeifer stated, "We also have every copy of the Hmong Times going back to the beginning."

Pfeifer told Hmong Times that there have always been three main components of the Hmong Cultural Center - Adult Basic Education, Cultural Education and Multi-Cultural Education. For the Adult Education classes include English language and GED preparation. For Cultural Education students can learn traditional dance, funeral songs and how to play the qeej among other things. However this year the Multicultural education has received a big boost. "This is not really a new

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direction, but rather an enhancement of existing programs," Pfeifer said.

The Center received two grants from the Legacy Fund and Minnesota Historical Society to implement a new exhibit. "One grant was for planning and the other one for implementation. It was a two-year process. I wrote the script (for the exhibit) with Dr. Nengher Vang of UW Whitewater and Dr. Chia Vang of UW Milwaukee as external reviewers. Then Museology, a Minneapolis based professional museum production company, designed the exhibit," said Pfeifer. "It is a very high quality exhibit."

There is also a display of 14 sketch drawings of traditional Hmong tools done by artist Seexeng Lee. "This is not a new exhibit, but it has been set up for better viewing. We finally have an embroidery room. There are 10-12 really beautiful Hmong embroidery pieces," continued Pfeifer

The Center is now located in the heart of things, in the Asian Community, at 375 Western, Suite 204. This site is right at the Western Street Light Rail station.

On December 22nd the Center hosted an open house to launch their new library and to celebrate 23 years. "We invited the community to come check out the new exhibits. It was very well attended - at least 75 people were here." The evening included food and cultural presentation as well as a youth qeej performance.

"We are now a viable tourist attraction. We are the first organization to offer a permanent visitor experience in relation to the Hmong." The center is open 9-6 and weekends by appointment. "We are very fortunate to be in Little Mekong District. There were always restaurants and grocery stores. Now we have a place people can come and learn about the culture and history of the Hmong."

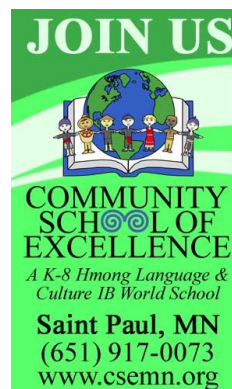
There is a suggested donation of \$3 for walk in visitors. Guided, organized tours "we negotiate."

"This is the first stage. We already know we are going to expand. We want to add another five display panels that will cover other elements of Hmong history," said Pfeifer. The display includes religion, language, and where they live around the world. This will bring the total museum display up to 15 panels.

To help with this next stage, Sieng Lee, a young museum professional and exhibit designer, will help with development. "We contracted with him. He will help with labeling and layout and do them professionally, he will really help enhance the look."

Pfeiffer added, "The exhibits are open to everyone, the target audience is younger Hmong and non-Hmong - people coming in with not that much information. We want to facilitate multicultural understanding and have displays and exhibits to come in and learn."

The Cultural Center hopes to have 2,000 visitors in 2016. Funders for the Center include City of St. Paul Cultural Star Grant, The Asian Pacific Endowment of the St. Paul Foundation, MoneyGram Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation and the Minnesota Historical Society.



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