

An American Gem

The Wing Luke Museum receives distinction from the National Park Service

By Deanna Duff

from the *Northwest Asian Weekly*

The Wing Luke Museum celebrated the Lunar New Year by embarking on a new chapter in its own future. Visiting U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar designated the museum as an affiliated area of the National Park Service on the morning of February 10th, the first day of the Year of the Snake.

“We take on these initiatives because if we are to become a more perfect union, we need to make sure that we’re celebrating the history and heritage of all of America’s people,” said Salazar.

The recognition makes Wing Luke, the only museum dedicated to the Asian Pacific American experience, the park service’s 25th affiliated site. Other sites include the Inupiat Heritage Center in Alaska and the American Memorial Park in Saipan. Although affiliated sites are not national parks nor operated by the Park Service, the partnership means increased national promotion and assistance.

Salazar also announced the launch of the nationwide Asian American Pacific Islander Theme Study at the Wing Luke event, which will spotlight the community’s often untold heritage. The AAPI study is the Department of the Interior’s most recent cultural focus following previous efforts to feature African American, Latino, and women’s histories.

“The Northwest has the fifth highest portion of Asian Pacific Islanders in the country. We have the most diverse zip code, 98118, in the country,” said Senator Maria Cantwell. Cantwell hopes, “This designation means a lot of people will be coming to

visit the International District.”

Community participation, a hallmark of the Wing’s success, was evident throughout the day’s events. The memory of Wing Luke “the museum’s namesake and Washington’s first Asian American to hold elected office via the Seattle City Council in 1962 “was honored by the attendance of his three sisters.

Community traditions were woven throughout the programming. Before the formal presentations, the vividly-costumed Lieu Quan Lion Dance Team performed before the packed auditorium. The custom is believed to impart joy, good luck, and prosperity. To the delight of the crowd, Salazar gladly participated in the good-luck “feeding” of the lions.

Among the multitude of attending dignitaries were Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget at the Department of Interior Rhea Suh; National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis; King County Executive Dow Constantine; and Washington’s congressional delegation Senators Cantwell and Patty Murray and Congressmen Jim McDermott and Adam Smith.

Prior to the dedication, special guests were given a private tour by Wing Luke Executive Director Beth Takekawa. Included in the tour were special exhibits, such as “Asian American Homelessness” and a trip through the East Kong Yick Building, which recreates the typical, spartan rooms where early 20th-century immigrants lived.

“Museums are often thought of as buildings and you bring artifacts and ancient things and stick them in there, and people come in and look around and





U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and other dignitaries attend the ceremony making the Wing Luke museum part of the National Park Service

that's a museum," said Congressman McDermott, longtime museum supporter and representative of the International District. "This is not that kind of museum. This is the home of the Asian Pacific community."

A segment that particularly resonated was a presentation by YouthCAN representatives Karen Liang and Nicholas Kaman. YouthCAN provides youth, ages 15 to 19 years, the opportunity to connect with their cultural histories.

"When I joined a few years ago, I was mainly interested in the art, but the experience has become more of a chance to learn about my Asian culture and myself," said Kaman.

Strengthening the connections between the past and present is an objective for Wing Luke Board of Trustee Midori Fulghum, who understands the importance of engaging and making the museum relevant to the youth.

"Sometimes for the following generations, there is the 'Who am I?' identity question," said Fulghum. "The museum is a great resource for the many biracial families and children to understand and help keep the traditions alive."

While the museum celebrates the past, its mission is equally forward looking, which is why the increased visibility is so valuable. That effort personally and professionally resonated with Assistant Director of the Interior Suh, herself a first-generation Korean American,

whose parents arrived in the United States following the Korean War. Those hopes culminated in Suh becoming the highest ranked Asian American in the Department of the Interior.

"This isn't just the story of my parents or the story of Asian American immigrants. It's truly the story of America. The Wing Luke Museum shares these stories," said Suh, terming it "an American gem."

Salazar signed the official documents confirming Wing Luke's new status in the eyes of the government. In the eyes of the community, the partnership was confirmed with a Japanese, Daruma-doll ceremony. A sign of good luck, eyes are painted on the brilliantly red, globe-sized heads once an endeavor is successfully completed. One will remain at Wing Luke and the other shall reside with the National Park Service, both favorably overseeing the new partnership.

"What we heard today is that the youth and community feel very responsible for the future of this museum." Senator Murray said. "They're taking that responsibility and continuing with it, which means the Wing Luke will be tremendous for generations to come."

For more information, visit www.wingluke.org.

The
WING
Wing Luke Museum of the
Asian Pacific American Experience



"This isn't just the story of my parents or the story of Asian American immigrants. It's truly the story of America. The Wing Luke Museum shares these stories..."

**Assistant Secretary for
Policy, Management, and
Budget at the Department of
Interior Rhea Suh**



A part of the preserved Chinatown Hotel, which is part of the Wing Luke Museum..

