



Local Hero Award: Art Wang

Art Wang has been a pioneer for the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. He was first elected as State Representative from the 27th District in 1980, the same location where Chinese Americans were expelled from Tacoma in 1885, and served for seven terms. At the time he was elected, the only persons of color in the House of Representatives were one other Asian American and one African American. Art chaired the Capital Budget, Revenue, and Commerce & Labor Committees in the House. He also served in both the executive and judicial branches of Washington State government as Chief Administrative Law Judge and as a Judge on the Court of Appeals. He practiced law in Tacoma and taught at UPS and Seattle University Law Schools.

Art came to Tacoma as a VISTA Volunteer with the Tacoma Community House in 1973, working as a community organizer with the Asian American community. He was a founder of the first Asian Caucus as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1976. He also was a co-founder of the Asian Elected Officials of Washington and organized training programs to recruit AANHPI candidates and campaign workers. One of those was his former Legislative Assistant Velma Veloria. Art is proud that he is the only Washington legislator who has ever had two Legislative Assistants become legislators themselves.

Some of Art's legislative accomplishments are now taken for granted, which he believes is a sign of progress. For example, he enacted the first Martin Luther King, Jr. school holiday, one of the first Family and Medical Leave Acts in the country, the Puyallup Tribe Land Claims Settlement, and co-sponsored the first initiative increasing the state minimum wage, all of which were highly controversial at the time. Land he acquired for the state also became the site of the Chinese Reconciliation Park.

Art has also chaired boards for the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, Tahoma Audubon Society, Legal Foundation of Washington, Pierce County AIDS Foundation, and Planned Parenthood. Among other nonprofit boards he has served on are the National Audubon Society, APACE, TVW, Tacoma Community House, and Grand Cinema. He continues to serve on advisory boards for the Asian Pacific Cultural Center and the Chinese Reconciliation Project Foundation and to lead monthly bird walks for the Tahoma Bird Alliance.

On behalf of CAPAA, please accept this award for your dedication and commitment to the AA-NH/PI communities in WA State. Please join us in celebrating Art Wang.