

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Friday, May 5, 2006

Cultural bridge builders honored for efforts

Police officers, businesswomen, high school students among those recognized by the Human Relations Commission.

By **CINDY CARCAMO**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

In a nation torn over issues such as illegal immigration, terrorism and pandemics, there are people bridging the gap between groups that may have trouble understanding each other.

A pair of police officers sparked dialogue between law enforcement and Asian community members. One man chronicled individuals of different sexual orientation and lifestyles. Schoolchildren organized a diversity film festival.

They and others who gave people a better understanding of culture and diversity were honored Thursday night at the Orange County Human Relations Commission's 35th anniversary celebration.

"You look at the animosity and fear generated by hot-button issues like immigration. There are so many things dividing us," said Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the

commission. "We try to create an Orange County where all feel respect and inclusion in our society ... in our neighborhoods."

Those honored at The Grove of Anaheim included:

- Irvine police officers Mike Li and Robert Hung, who invited the Asian community to learn about issues such as civics and traffic law. The men also introduced their colleagues to Asian community leaders and cultural practices.
- The San Clemente Police Services Parent Project team, which offered classes on adolescent issues to more than 700 parents.
- Dick Hitt of Irvine, one of the primary researchers for the Orange County Historic Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Time Line Project.
- Maria Khani of Huntington Beach, who dispelled myths about Islam during workshops and at schools.
- Katella High School teenagers, who launched a campaign against hate and violence, leading to a school district Unity Fest.
- Fountain Valley High School students, who created the Diversity Film Festival and a Day of Dialogue.
- Hamid Kahn, executive director of the South Asian Network, who spoke against inequality and advocated for immigrants, women and better health care.
- The Orange County chapter of Links Inc., a group of black professional women who used art programs to help at-risk youths.
- Gwen and Jim Johnson, who founded the Citizens for Peace Building Initiative and have been volunteers in the county for about 35 years.
- Bob Martinez of Latino Youth Leadership Institute, who created an annual event that educates and empowers more than 1,000 Hispanics.
- Cypress Police Department officials, who allowed officers to work with community groups to resolve crime and other issues.
- Western High School students, who organized Cultural Understanding presentations and International Week.

The commission also honored Bobby Moresco, the Oscar-winning co-screenwriter for "Crash."