

SASF History



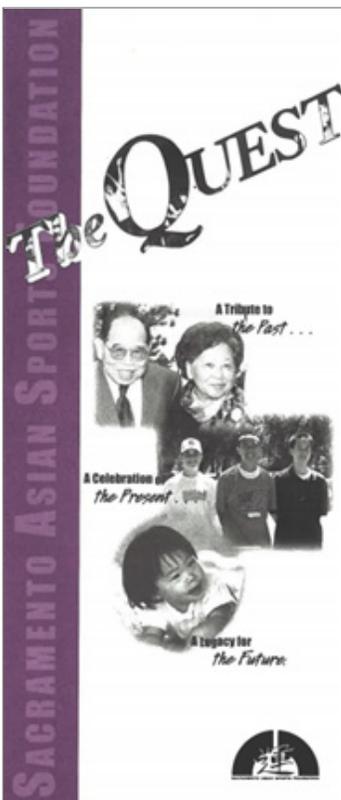
It often begins with something as simple as a dream...

In July 1993, a group of seven (7) individuals of Asian ancestry began envisioning a gym targeting the Sacramento Asian Sports community. This inaugural group was led by Jerry Chong, Eddie Fong, Robert Fong, Don Lee, Ray Lee, Barry Lim, and Rod Yung. Their support came exclusively from individuals involved with the Chinese Community Church

Sports program and the Sacramento Warlords Basketball Organization with hosting the inaugural fundraising basketball New Year Classic tournament. Although this first tournament was small, it was an overwhelming success, attracting local teams as well as teams from the Bay Area and San Jose.

As the concept of building a gym began to gain momentum, it became apparent that broad community support would be imperative for this massive project and the idea of building a gym grew to build a facility where not only sports could be played but a place where community events could also be hosted. This became the Quest for a community/recreational facility. Fundraisers and activities began to take on a new direction of “community events”, reaching far and wide for volunteer support regardless of their organization affiliation to pursue the common dream to build a community/recreational facility.

In 1994, the group became incorporated as an official non-profit public entity, under Section 501(c) (3) with the name, the Sacramento Asian Sports Foundation (SASF). The SASF’s motto became “The Quest” to build a state-of-the art sports facility and a cultural center celebrating the cultures of all Asians and Pacific Islanders.



The vision of SASF was to build an Asian community/recreational facility for Sacramento which would be a gathering place for all generations, a place to link Asian traditions and values. The facility would serve the needs of youth through recreational programs that would boost self-esteem, positive decision making and a solid foundation for community pride and spirit. The SASF believed the value in team sports exists in the fellowships that are created when playing and working together. Our seniors would also have a place to socialize and instill cultural pride within our youth. The SASF’s vision was that this could be a place of limitless possibilities – reaching Asians and Non-Asians, a legacy we could leave for our children and future generations.

From the beginning, SASF was not affiliated with any particular church or community organization, however, we received the support of prominent community organizations such as the Sacramento Japanese American Citizen League (JAACL), Chinese American Council of Sacramento (CACS), Asian Peace Officers Association, Sacramento Asian Pacific Chamber of Commerce, California Teacher’s Association, and prominent community leaders such as Mayor and City Councilman Jimmie Yee, the late Congressman Robert Matsui, Congressman Mike Honda, Senator Mike Machado, Senator Darrell Steinberg, County Assessor Roger Fong, County Board of Supervisors Don Notolli, Illa Collins, and Roger Dickinson, and the late Frank Fat.

The Sacramento sports community played a significant role in providing hundreds of volunteers for “The Quest” to build the community/recreational facility. The Northern California Church League (NCCL) sports program consisted of the Chinese Community Church, Sacramento Buddhist Church, Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church, Parkview Presbyterian Church, Florin Buddhist Church as well as the “club basketball organizations”, Sacramento Warlords, Sacramento Barons Athletic Organization and the Sacramento Rebels, all pulled together to support and provide volunteers for many fundraisers and events. This was truly the key to our success.

SASF sponsored numerous fundraisers to raise seed money toward building the community/recreational facility. In the early days, all monies from fundraisers were earmarked for the building fund. The SASF had no paid staff. Led by Jerry Chong and a Board of Directors, each unselfishly dedicated their free time and received no compensation for their efforts with all of them holding down their own full-time jobs/businesses. No volunteers were paid for their time or efforts in supporting the goal to build a community/recreational facility. No portion of the proceeds or contributions were used for administrative costs. All administrative work was done on each of the volunteer’s own time and own dime. 100% of the net proceeds from fundraisers and donations went to the building fund.



Jerry Chong, First SASF President

SASF Presidents

1994 - 1996	Jerry Chong
1997 - 2001	Rodney Kunisaki
2002 - 2010	Karen Cotton
2011 - 2020	Don Lee
2021 - Present	Steve Hamamoto

SASF Inaugural Team

Don Lee	Vice-President
Karen Cotton	Secretary, Fundraising & Community Ambassador
Robert Fong	Youth Programs & Summer League
Jeff Harada	Community Relations
Kuni Hironaka	Executive Advisor
Rodney Kunisaki	Brick Committee
Ellen Kwong	Investment Advisor & Community Activist
Tony Lewis	Legal Counsel
Marcia Matsuda	Community Relations
Julie Ota	Interior Design & Youth Development
Dr. Steve Seto	Membership Committee
Amy Wong	Crab Feed & Golf Tournament Chair
Debbie Sato Wong	Fundraising Committee
Mamie Yee	Administration & Historian
Rodney Yung	Building Committee

Fundraising Begins

ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S CLASSIC BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

One of the SASF's first major fundraiser started in 1994 was the Annual New Year's Classic Invitational Basketball Tournament. At its peak, the tournament became one of the largest in Northern California, hosting over 180 boys' and girls' teams in 20+ divisions from ages 7 to 18 years old from throughout California with teams from Hawaii and Japan attending several times. That amounts to approximately 1800 players each year plus thousands of parents, grandparents and siblings! Over 300 volunteers from churches, sports and community organizations assisted in staging this event.



Bev Yung & Carol Chong selling tournament t-shirts



Serving attendees at our Social



Sacramento players greet teams from Matsuyama Japan at the Opening Night of the 10th Annual SASF New Year's Classic Invitational Basketball Tournament in 2003

Our tournament goal was to provide a fair and competitive environment for all teams and to promote good sportsmanship. Our success was measured by the lifelong friendships created. Our participants learned the value of teamwork and good sportsmanship through competition. The tournament also included a sell-out teen dance at the Hilton Hotel. The younger participants were treated to a carnival planned and operated by our own local basketball players. The tournament became known for its \$5 Steak Dinner prepared by Chef Don Lee and his kitchen crew. Our 21st Annual Tournament held in 2014 was our last tournament. The tournament committee and SASF Board of Director made the difficult decision to end our tournament due to the large number of competing tournaments making it difficult for us to fill our divisions.

SUMMER BASKETBALL LEAGUE

Our initial summer basketball league program organized by Robert Fong & Jan Yoshioka included 1200 boys and girls from 4th grade thru 9th grade. A secondary summer basketball program was Basic Hoops for our pre-school to 3rd grade youth teaching fundamental basketball skills. The unique approach of our summer league programs was all coaches, referees, and score/timekeepers were basketball players who graduated from the summer league program. This was an opportunity to mentor our next generation, share their knowledge of the sport, and teach responsibility and leadership. This is the SASF's mantra to teach our youth that there is no greater cause then to serve your community by returning what you have received.



Jan Yoshioka & Robert Fong team-up to chair the Summer League

ANNUAL CRAB FEED AND SILENT AUCTION

Another major fundraiser started in 1994 was the Annual Crab Feed Dinner and Silent Auction. Originally held at the Confucius Hall hosting approximately 600 attendees who enjoyed crab, bingo games, silent auction and raffle prizes generously donated by community businesses. The Silent Auction included a superb selection of gifts such as Golf Packages; Giants, Kings & 49er Game Tickets; Getaway Vacations; Spa Packages; Beauty Packages; Living Trust Plan; Gift Certificates; Autographed Memorabilia; and a slew of Gift Baskets!

After our facility was built, we were able to expand the number of attendees to 800. Our Crab Feed is unique from all others as the crab is cooked “Asian-style” with garlic and black bean sauce and served with homemade Chinese Chicken Salad and Fried Rice. This remains a sellout event every year.



2000 Crab Feed Chair Amy Wong with Nancy Lee



Silent Auction Committee in 2000



Jimmie & Mary Yee attending our annual Crab Feed in 2000 (front row). Back row: Rodney Kunisaki, Pat Fong Kushida and Jerry Chong



2004 Crab Feed Servers

ADULT GOLF TOURNAMENT

In 1996, Mikuni Restaurant sponsored the SASF's first golf tournament at the El Dorado Country Club. 144-golfers participated in an 18-hole Shot-Gun Tournament concluding with a buffet dinner provided by Mikuni Restaurant. Many prominent businesses in the Sacramento area participated by sponsoring holes and the chance to win big prizes for a hole-in-one. A Toyota car, Caribbean cruise, and jet skis were among the eligible prizes. This became an annual event for many years, with golf courses Teal Bend and The Reserve also used to host the event.



Mike Liang, Don Lee, Stuart Satow, Karen Cotton, and Robert Fong at 2003 Adult Golf Tournament

JR. GOLF TOURNAMENT

From 1999 to 2005, the SASF hosted a Jr. Golf Tournament for boys and girls ages 8 to 18 at the William Land Park Golf Course. The fun kid's tournament was non-competitive and played using a "scramble" format to promote good sportsmanship and team play. The tournament included local small businesses sponsoring each hole, and a BBQ chicken lunch with prizes, raffle gifts, and swag bags for all participants.



Jr. Golf Tournament Chairs Missy Kuyama and Kevin Matsuo

NORDSTROM SHOPPING NIGHT

Nordstrom Shopping Night at Arden Fair Mall was an invitation only event to thank our ardent supporters. SASF supporters had the entire store to themselves for a shopping spree evening. A live band played "shopping music" with each floor serving a variety of beverages, appetizers and desserts. Nordstrom's showcased special offers, complimentary gifts with purchases and raffles. It was a fun and memorable evening for the several hundred guests that attended.



Karen Cotton greets Nordstrom Shopping guests



Kuni Hironaka greets Nordstrom shopping guests



Don & Marcia Matsuda at Nordstrom Shopping Night

VEHICLE DONATION PROGRAM

Another fundraiser initiated in 2002 was the Vehicle Donation Program. With the support of Rodney Kunisaki, owner of Walsh Station Automotive Service, the net sales from donated vehicles go directly to SASF. The added benefit, is the donor qualifies for a tax write-off by donating their vehicle. The Vehicle Donation Program is still in operation today.

VISIONARY BRICK PROGRAM

The sale of engraved Bricks was an opportunity for our community to eternally leave their marking. For a contribution of \$1,000, a Visionary Brick is placed in the front of the building around the Don Matsuda Memorial Fountain. The Bricks allow personalized inscriptions, many of them inscribed as “in memory of”, “in honor of”, or “in the name of” a family, individual, or basketball team. These Bricks have become permanent remembrances.



WINE AND FOOD TASTING FESTIVAL

In 2003, SASF embarked on its 1st Annual Wine & Food Tasting Festival, hosted at the fabulous home of prominent restaurateurs Wing & Chee Fat. The classy event included special attention to detail such as valet parking, live music, plenty of wine and food to taste and sample, an array of silent auction items, handmade gourmet goodies and celebrity chef demonstrations.



Lina Fat & President Karen Cotton



Paul & Mae Fong enjoying wine & friendship

HOLIDAY ASIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS FAIR

June Kurano chaired a Holiday Asian Arts & Crafts Fair for many years with 10% of all gross sales being donated to the SASF. The craft fair held in November was directed toward the holiday shoppers looking for that special Christmas ornament, greeting cards, t-shirts, candles, jewelry, soap, pillows and many other Asian crafts.

OTHER FUNDRAISERS

The SASF also participated in the Pacific Rim Festival, sponsored a Mushball Team, hosted a Nike 3 for All Contest, participated in a Mariners baseball game recognizing Asian baseball players, all in the spirit of raising money and spreading the word regarding our “Quest” to build a community/recreational facility, garnering support and becoming a relevant and respected community organization.



June Kurano showcasing her crafts

Japan Goodwill Tour

In 2005 the SASF sponsored a boys and girls basketball team to participate in a goodwill basketball exchange with Sacramento's sister city, Matsuyama, Japan. The object of the exchange was to promote goodwill between two countries to promote the spirit of the game, good sportsmanship, and to educate the youth in Sacramento to understand the importance of global friendship and the value of traditions and culture of Japan. Under the directorship of Christine Kojima, coaches Harvey Tahara and Brandon Yung, and the Matsuyama Sister City leaders Hiroko Ninomiya and Alice Hamamoto, it was the trip of a lifetime. A group of 75 went for a 10-day tour of Japan that included basketball games in Hiroshima and Matsuyama; the beautiful temples of Kiyoto; the World Expo in Nagoya and the final stop in Tokyo which included a visit to Disneyland and Disney by the Sea. The group were honored guests at numerous functions, signing autographs, photographed for local Japan newspaper and were featured and interviewed on the Japan television news station.



Chaperones enjoying the games in Japan

In return, Japan was able to attend our 14th Annual New Year Classic Invitational Basketball Tournament in 2007. We reciprocated by rolling out the red carpet. The group was treated to two special dinners one prepared by Chef Don Lee's kitchen crew and another by Reiko Kurahara and her crew; a trip to the State Capital; a day at Sutter Middle School; a homestay for each of the players; a trip to San Francisco and the Vacaville outlets, basketball clinic by coaches Harvey Tahara, Brandon Yung, Jeff Ota and Rodney Kunisaki, and participation in the tournament games and festivities. It was obvious that the memories of the trip and the friendships would last a lifetime.



The group at the airport ready to fly to Japan!



SASF players and coaches that made the trip to Japan.

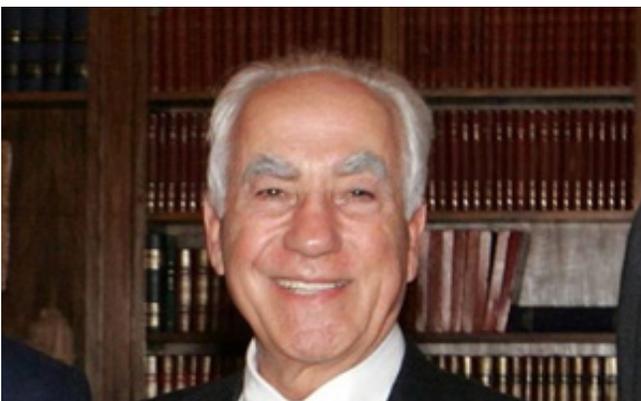
Front Row: Rachel Uda, Courtney Louie, Kaelin Uchida, Brittney Wong, Tori Satow, and Allison Hiuga.

Middle Row: Coach Harvey Tahara, Alyssa Chow, Krystal Ishii, Sheri Yuki, Jordan Chan, Tori Hironaka, Akemi Yuki, Kaela SooHoo, and Kimi Nakamura

Back row: Teddy Moy, Kevin Morita, Robbie Jong, Steven Toy, Brandon Yee, Coach Brandon Yung, and Miranda Melliza

Major Donations & Grants

After years of fundraising, the SASF's quest to build a community/recreational facility received a huge boost in 1998 when prominent developer and philanthropist Angelo Tsakopoulos donated 2.7 acres of land in Laguna West to SASF to build our facility. Tsakopoulos the founder and owner of AKT Development has made many contributions to the educational and cultural life of the greater community. Tsakopoulos said the donation was a way to "give back to the community. No one does anything alone," he said. "We cannot even pick a pebble up with one finger. It takes two." The SASF is forever grateful to Mr. Tsakopoulos' for his extremely generous donation and believing in "the Quest".



Angelo Tsakopoulos gave a huge boost to SASF in 1998 by donating the land on High Tech Court



President Rodney Kunisaki & Angelo Tsakopoulos at our 2008 Crab Feed

The Tsakopoulos family was committed to assisting the SASF in getting the community/recreational facility built and hosted a reception at their fabulous home on February 23, 2001 to officially kick-off the Capital Building Fund Campaign. The reception was an opportunity to open doors to new and lasting relationships with prominent community members. Attendees included: Congressman Robert Matsui, City Councilman Jimmie Yee, Superior Court Judge Trena Burger, Senator Mike Machado, Sheriff & Mrs. Lou Balanas, Sacramento City Unified School District Board member Rob King Fong & Ms. Shirley Tulley, Dennis Brennan (McDonald's Corporation), Al Gianini (Manager Director, CB & Ellis), Rusty Hammer (President & CEO, Metro Chamber of Commerce), John Thomas (President, Sacramento Kings) and Fred & Nancy Teichert (Teichert Foundation).



Dr. Steven Seto, Congressman Robert Matsui, Paul & Mae Fong, and Karen Cotton at the kick-off of the Capital Building Fund Campaign

With the support of Assembly members Darrell Steinberg and Michael Machado, California's Assembly Budget Committee approved a \$500,000 line item for the community/recreational facility in the FY 2000/01 Budget Act. The SASF received bipartisan support in the Assembly and Senate through lobbying efforts of many community officials. This was a historical event as it was the first budgeted line item ever approved on behalf of the API community in Sacramento County.

In 2000 Andy Wong, Wells Fargo Market President of the Town & Country area was instrumental in Wells Fargo Bank donating \$50,000 to the Capital Building Fund. Wells Fargo believed in the SASF vision to promote and support sports activities and cultural programs.



SASF was the proud recipient of the 3rd Annual George J. Maloof Sr. Community Cup. The Community Cup is dedicated to making a positive and meaningful impact in the lives of people within the Sacramento community. The SASF was honored and presented a check for \$100,000 during the King's home game on October 14, 2001.

Left to right: Julie Ota, Board of Supervisor Jimmie Yee, Karen Cotton, Karen Tomine, Rodney Kunisaki and City Councilman Robert King Fong

In 2002 Congressman Robert T. Matsui and his staff were instrumental in the SASF receiving a federal appropriation of \$300,000 toward the permit, fees and building of the community/recreational facility.

Also, in 2002 the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors awarded the SASF \$250,000 toward the Capital Building Fund.

With Mr. Tsakopoulos' land donation and major financial sponsors, SASF's quest to build a community/recreational facility became a reality. In 2003, SASF Ambassadors Karen Cotton and Ellen Kwong were successful in obtaining a pivotal donation of \$1 million from the Wong Family which had owned the BelAir supermarket chain before they sold it to Raley's. The Wong family's accomplishments are the epitome of an Asian American success story. Bill Wong, spokesman for the Wong family was born in China and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 5. The first BelAir market opened in 1955, and by the time the family sold the business to Raley's in 1992, they had grown to a chain of 18 stores. "This is a project that we really wanted to support. The success of any business is you have to contribute back to the community. They're the ones who support you," said Wong. We have honored the Wong Family by naming our building, "BelAir Wong Family, Sacramento Asian Sports Foundation".



Left to Right: George Wong, President Karen Cotton, Bill Wong, Paul Wong, and Al Wong (Wong brothers of Bel Air Supermarkets)

Groundbreaking

After reaching the fundraising goal of \$3 million, and with the major financial sponsors the Wong Family, Wing Kai and Chee Fat, Jimmie Yee, Frank Fat, Quan Family, Don and Marcia Matsuda, Naywah Tom, Paul & Mae Fong of Fong & Fong Printers & Lithographer, the family of the late Sam & Ann Wong, and Dr. Tim & Gigi Mar and family in memory of Paul Alexander Mar, the SASF broke ground in 2005.



2005 Groundbreaking Ceremony



SASF Leadership team at the time of Groundbreaking Ceremony (left to right): Karen Cotton, Rodney Yung, Tony Lewis, Amy Wong, Marcia Matsuda, Don Lee, Rodney Kunisaki, Julie Ota, and Kevin Wong.

The draft, design and building team was led by Darryl Chinn, Steve Hamamoto, Jeff Tsuruoka, and Rod Yung with the partnership of Scott Maxwell of Unger Construction, Ryan Fong of AKT Properties and Kem Modellas of New West Partitions. The beautiful landscape surrounding the building was designed and donated by Don & Marcia Matsuda of Matsuda's Nursery.



Building design team (left to right): Mark Catching (Unger Construction), Jeff Tsuruoka, Steve Hamamoto, Darryl Chinn, Scott Maxwell (VP Unger Construction), Joe Yee, Rod Yung



*Interior Design Team
(left to right): Kristi
Omoto, Julie Ota,
Rod Yung, Marcia
Matsuda, Jayne
Rasmussen, and
Susan Low*

The community/recreational facility was opened in March 2007 just in time for the 14th Annual New Year's Classic Invitational Basketball Tournament. None of this would have been possible without the generous donations, thousands of volunteer hours and support from our community.



Although over the last three decades SASF has grown and evolved to accommodate the changing composition and dynamics of the community, our mission continues to be to meet and serve the needs of the youth in our community.

***Written by: Melissa Matsuura Kuyama
Contributions from: Rodney Kunisaki and Karen Cotton
Graphic Designer: Sydney Kuyama***