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Tam Nguyen, VIBE president, with Son Kim Vo and student Mark Pham

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# Building Bridges Between CSUF and Vietnamese Students and Community

## VIBE Gala, Free Expo Offers Traditional Food, Dance and Entertainment

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October 8, 2007  
By Debra Cano Ramos

For the last two decades, Son Kim Vo has worked tirelessly to strengthen ties and build stronger relationships between Cal State Fullerton and the Vietnamese community in Orange County.

The coordinator of the university's Intercultural Development Center has not only accomplished her goals, but also will be

lauded for her efforts at an Oct. 11 gala that is part of VIBE — Vietnamese International Bridging Expo — the first-of-its-kind event in the university's 50-year history.

"I am glad VIBE came into existence; it will help to continue to foster the positive relationship between Cal State Fullerton and the Vietnamese community," said Vo, who was instrumental in starting Vietnamese language and Asian American studies programs. She will be presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award for her work.

[VIBE is a three-day public celebration](#), Oct. 11-13, where arts, business, culture and education meet, said Tam Nguyen, VIBE president.

"VIBE aims to strengthen our ties by increasing awareness and participation in our programs, cultivating future students and alumni and building a stronger sense of community," added Nguyen, a CSUF alumnus and co-founder of the Vietnamese American MBA Association for alumni.

Themed "The Golden Destination," the event is one of the many activities celebrating the university's 50th anniversary this year.

"I am proud that this event is on our campus and underscores our mission to build bridges with the Vietnamese community," said President Milton A. Gordon.

Kicking off the VIBE festivities is the Oct. 11 gala at the Titan Student Union, where guests will be treated to traditional

Vietnamese food and entertainment followed by an awards presentation honoring individuals who have made a difference in the Vietnamese American community. Five CSUF students will receive scholarships in recognition of their academic achievements. Tickets for the gala, held from 7 to 10 p.m., are \$60 each or \$500 for a table of 10.

The exposition from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 12-13 at Titan Student Union will showcase Vietnamese culture, art, dance, music and fashion. More than 70 vendors will be on hand, including community health organizations and local businesses. The Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association will present a children's art display. Expo admission is free and registration is requested at [www.vibexpo.com](http://www.vibexpo.com).

A free shuttle to and from Little Saigon to campus will be offered Saturday, Oct. 13, for the expo. The shuttle stop is located in the parking lot of Thanh Duong Little Saigon, a church at 10321 Bolsa Ave., between Ward and Brookhurst streets in Westminster.

### **Growth of a community**

In 1975 after the fall of Saigon, families fled their homeland for the U.S. Many settled in Orange County's Little Saigon, today home to the oldest, largest and most prominent Vietnamese community in the United States, outside of Vietnam. These immigrants and their children are active in the local community, making contributions in the arts, culture, business, politics and

education.

Many of these immigrants also are choosing to attend Cal State Fullerton to earn college degrees. This fall, more than 2,100 Vietnamese students are enrolled and thousands have earned degrees at CSUF.

“We are committed to ensuring that they not only succeed, but also feel the sense of community our campus offers,” Gordon said. “I am committed to continuing our work with the Vietnamese community. Together we can continue to build bridges to a bright future, fulfilling the promise of education and opportunity.”

The idea for VIBE originated with a group of Vietnamese students, alumni and entrepreneurs who wanted to put on a community event that would highlight the Vietnamese culture and people, noted Nguyen, who was an infant when his family came to this country in 1975.

“Our hope is that this event will increase Cal State Fullerton’s visibility, and that the next generation continues to build upon the existing foundation of our predecessors,” said Nguyen, a Little Saigon businessman who earned an M.B.A. from Cal State Fullerton and also holds a doctor of medicine.

American-born Mark Pham, a senior and member of the Associated Students Inc. board of directors, is excited about VIBE educating all students about his culture. “I hope that

students and others who attend the event will not only have more understanding about the Vietnamese community, but that they also have a certain admiration for our culture. This might be a stretch, but this event also might break the stereotypes that some students may have about the Vietnamese people.”

A human services major who plans on becoming a social worker, Pham was involved with planning the event and hopes that this year is the start of a long tradition on campus.

“VIBE is really a great opportunity for all students and community members to come and have fun, and it’s also a time for young Vietnamese students to come and be proud of their heritage.”

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