

# Giving Strength to Their Stories

Story By: Tommy Thao

## New Wisconsin bill requires students to learn Hmong history

For many generations, the history and contributions of the Hmong community have stayed hidden, leaving many unaware of the significant role they played. This forced silence developed the lingering ideas of misconception, fueling widespread misunderstanding and internal struggle.

“A lot of us go through internalized racism, where we try to figure out our identity as Hmong people and where we fit in as Hmong and American citizens,” Physical Education teacher Nancy Xiong said. “It’s so important to learn our history, where we come from, and get accurate information.”

The struggle for identity has left many feeling isolated and disconnected from both cultures. Fortunately, on April 4, 2024, Governor Tony Evers signed the 2023 Wisconsin Act 266 into law, which requires Hmong history to be included in the school curriculum.

“Now that it’s required for the whole state to learn Hmong history, I hope that smaller communities receive accurate information instead of gossip and stereotypes,” Nancy Xiong said.

Sixty two years ago, the Hmong people helped play a crucial, but an often overlooked role, in supporting America during the Vietnam War. As part of the Hmong Special Guerrilla Unit (HSGU), many of them fought alongside American soldiers helping to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the battle of the Vietcong. Their bravery came at a heavy cost, losing family, lives, and homes.

“We’ve been in America for over 50 years, and we have a lot of history with working with American soldiers,” Nancy Xiong said.

Since then the Hmong have settled across America, and in particular here in Wausau, Wisconsin.

However, because the United States intelligence agencies were limiting details around these circumstances, many still don’t fully understand the true reason why the Hmong have chosen to reside here.



### Master Motivator

Officer Kimberly Yang gives a presentation on the Hmong Institute, which provides opportunities for those in need and helps build stronger communities. Because of her experiences with overcoming societal prejudice, preconceptions, and her parents’ rejection, she inspires Hmong individuals to excel in any line of work regardless of what others may say.

Submitted by Nancy Xiong

“Many of our families and generations kept quiet just because this was a part of the CIA,” senior Gina Xiong said.

Through the collaboration between the Hmong and American soldiers, a reliable connection was established. However, it came at a cost with many of the Hmong losing their families and lives. Despite these circumstances, the promise of protection and a new home was an opportunity they couldn’t afford to miss.

“It’s important to educate other Americans that we are rightfully here and that we can call this home,” Nancy Xiong said.



### Teaming Up

During the Hmong/Lao Veterans Day event, Wausau West students were joined by Sheboygan and Sun Prairie High School students to take a commemorative picture in Governor Tony Ever's office. The combined group learned about their ancestors' struggle getting to America.

Submitted by Nancy Xiong

By learning about their own heritage, students can not only embrace their culture but can also inspire communities.

"It should be in our curriculum so that we understand this knowledge, not only for Hmong students but also for our community," Gina Xiong said. "Many of our students at West feel scared to embrace their culture or lack the knowledge of how their upbringing has shaped them."

When cultures share and exchange their knowledge, they build empathy and connect not only within their own community, but each other's cultural backgrounds.

"I feel like it helps if someone can talk about their culture; it makes me feel included," Gina Xiong said.

Once Hmong history is taught in schools, students are more likely to engage and connect, because their own history and culture are being represented.

"I think it's important because, in our school, there's a huge Hmong community that doesn't know their history as much," senior Kaitlyn Yang said.

By learning and embracing their heritage, the students can help find a sense of belonging, mending the feeling of isolation from within the community.

"Once they start doing that, they'll start wanting to do activities that involve their heritage and ethnicity," Yang said. "With more understanding, we can break down stereotypes."

Although this bill does allow for more discussion to happen, many may not take this opportunity but rather feel bored and uninterested.

"Even though we saw that the bill is happening in our own town in Wausau, Wisconsin, it kind of feels like, 'Oh, it's there...'" Gina Xiong said. "I feel like students may feel the same way, like, 'Whatever.'"

Acknowledging this bill is not enough, according to students at West, it needs to be taught emotionally to resonate within the community.

"I think it should be taught in an emotional aspect and have an actual person explain it," Gina Xiong said.

While this bill has some shortcomings, it will still enable and empower the Hmong community to reclaim their hidden history, ensuring that their stories are not only told but also preserved for generations to come.

"As we share our history," Yang said. "We not only honor our past but also pave the way for future generations to embrace who we are."



### Back Stage Pass

Seniors Jaylah Vang and Kaitlyn Yang, with representatives from other schools, were given an exclusive tour of Governor Tony Ever's office. Together, they discovered the significance of this space, which was crucial to the passage of legislation.

Submitted by Nancy Xiong