

Fresnans take Hmong welcome mat abroad

By Doug Hoagland
The Fresno Bee

(Updated Tuesday, March 9, 2004, 5:27 AM)

Thousands of Hmong refugees in Thailand poised to resettle in Fresno need to know the whispered stories of white giants waiting to eat them here are false.

As are the myths that they won't have food in America, but will have to nibble on salt.

So a local delegation of community leaders plans to visit the Wat Tham Krabok refugee camp in April to provide correct information to nearly 15,000 refugees. Of that number, 2,000 to 3,000 are thought to be headed to the Fresno area beginning this summer.

In addition to debunking rumors about America, the delegation needs to tell Hmong who plan to come to Fresno that they are welcome here, says Blong Xiong of the Fresno Center For New Americans, which is helping organize the delegation.

"We don't have the jobs for this group [of refugees]," Xiong told more than 40 officials of government and social service agencies Monday in Fresno. "But we can't put a wall around the Central Valley."

Monday's gathering served to update officials on the details of the upcoming resettlement, which will be loaded with young people. Of the approximately 15,000 Hmong who were registered by the Thai government for possible resettlement, about 8,000 are younger than 14, according to a Minnesota congressional office. Minnesota expects to get several thousand of the refugees.

Officials on Monday also discussed four areas considered crucial to resettlement in Fresno: housing, education, health care and employment services.

Xiong said extending a Fresno welcome to refugees still in Thailand makes financial sense because of "secondary migration." Federal funds to assist communities with refugees go to the first place they settle, not their second or third homes in America.

So, Xiong said in an interview, "we might as well do what we can to prepare for this group and let them know if you're going to come here, then come to the city of Fresno so you can also bring the resources as well."

Fresno County lost out on money when thousands of Hmong refugees resettled in the United States in the 1980s, but moved to Fresno after living in other cities or states first, according to Deputy County Administrative Officer Jeanette Ishii. Ishii attended Monday's meeting.

Today, nearly 28,000 Hmong live in Fresno County, primarily in Fresno and Clovis. The Hmong, who lived in the mountains of Laos, allied themselves with the Americans during the Vietnam War and fought Communist forces.

When the Communists took over Laos in the mid-1970s, many Hmong fled to Thailand, before migrating to the United States and other Western nations. All Hmong who arrive in America as political refugees, as designated by the U.S. government, have legal status, according to the Rev. Sharon Stanley. Stanley is executive director of Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries, or FIRM, an advocacy group for Fresno-area immigrants.

Stanley attended Monday's meeting and said in an interview she's glad a delegation from Fresno hopes to visit the refugees: "If they come here first, dollars follow. If they don't, we'll never catch up financially as a city and county."

Xiong said the Fresno delegation could number 10 people, and "it would be a good showing" to the refugees if a city and county official traveled to Thailand with the group. No official has committed to going so far.

Xiong said the delegation needs \$20,000 to make the trip and report back, and that the Wells Fargo Foundation has pledged \$7,500 and the Alta Family Health Clinic in Dinuba committed to giving \$1,000. Xiong hopes the city of

RESOURCES

-  [E-mail This Article](#)
-  [Printer-Friendly Format](#)
-  [Receive the Daily Bulletin](#)
-  [Subscribe to Print](#)
-  [Join a Forum](#)

Fresno, Fresno County and Fresno-area school districts contribute as well: "This is not just a Hmong community issue. It's the entire community."

The reporter can be reached at dhoagland@fresnobee.com or 441-6354.

FresnoBee.com

THE McCLATCHY COMPANY

© 2004, The Fresno Bee

[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Text Only](#) | [Subscribe](#)
[Your Privacy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Child Protection](#)

[Modbee.com](#) | [Sacbee.com](#)