



CITY GOVERNMENT LOCAL NEWS NEWS

Five honored with Thong Hy Huynh awards

BY ANNE TERNUS-BELLAMY · MAY 20, 2021 · 493 VIEWS · 7 SHARES · 6 MINUTE READ

Thirty-eight years ago, the city of Davis was rocked by a violent hate crime: the racially motivated stabbing death of teenager Thong Hy Huynh on the Davis High School campus.

Huynh, a 17-year-old Vietnamese immigrant, died in the arms of a Davis police officer in a courtyard on campus on May 4, 1983. Jay Pierman, was was a 16-year-old Davis High student at the time, was later convicted of voluntary manslaughter.

During the reckoning and soul searching that followed Huynh's death, the school district installed a memorial plaque in the courtyard where he died, and the city established annual awards in Huynh's memory recognizing city residents for their contributions to diversity, community, social justice and equal rights.

One of this year's recipients, Francesca Wright — honored for her civil rights advocacy — said in looking at the list of past recipients, she was struck by a common set of attributes among all Thong Hy Huynh honorees.

"We are all people moved by our values for fairness, community and the oneness of humanity," Wright said during Tuesday evening's virtual awards ceremony by the City Council.

"We believe it is imperative to improve community systems so that we can support one another. And three, we invite others to question assumptions and to act to realize what we know is possible."



Thong Hy Huynh.
Enterprise file photo

55 today had he been alive.”

This year’s award ceremony, following a nomination and selection process overseen by the city’s Human Relations Commission, was particularly meaningful, said Mayor Gloria Partida, “in light of the very disturbing anti-Asian hate that has risen up.”

Knowing that “even after all of these years, we still need to do the work to address that,” said Partida, makes it even more important “to take a moment to remember that even here in Davis, we’re not insulated from it.”

Five individuals working to address those issues were honored Tuesday evening, including one posthumously.

Eva Dopico, a teacher at César Chávez Elementary School who died by suicide in late 2019, was honored as public servant of the year. The award is given annually to a local resident who has displayed exceptional interpersonal skills under challenging circumstances and whose efforts have resulted in effective conflict resolution or intervention and promoted positive human relations in the community.



Eva Dopico.
Courtesy
photo

Dopico’s contributions to the city, said Vice Mayor Lucas Frerichs, included serving families and the community through her work with the Davis Phoenix Coalition, the Whole Earth Festival, Cool Davis and the school district.

“She always contributed with meaningful and memorable social justice messaging and multicultural activities that were culturally affirming to hundreds of families and children throughout the Davis community,” said Frerichs. “Eva also advocated fearlessly against school bullying, especially (on behalf of) LGBTQ and native children. The mothers of those children have never forgotten this act of care and understanding as well as how she

taught a small, lucky generation of Davis students and blessed the lives of those who knew her.

“We lost this beautiful spirit, my wife Eva, to a lifelong struggle with chronic depression, which unfortunately she felt she had to hide in order to keep herself safe.”

Depression, said Jones, “is the silent pandemic.”

“One in five Davis youths seriously consider suicide, meaning they’ve thought about a plan to actually carry it out,” he said. “We must all work to stop this pandemic by being kind to each other. Instead of social distancing, we need true social connection.”

“Since Eva’s passing,” he added, the support from the Davis community has been “almost unimaginable.”

“This is the only place that Eva ever wanted to live,” he said. “I continue to hear stories about how her life affected others.”

He concluded by sharing the simple messages Dopico taught her elementary students: “Spread joy, make good decisions, stand up for yourself and stand up for others, be kind, celebrate diversity.”

Two young people who have embodied those messages were also honored by the city on Tuesday.

Receiving the Thong Hy Huynh young humanitarian awards were Valdy Ngassam and Xochitl Torres.

actions,” said Carson.

“Valdy,” he added, “has been the heart of the Black Student Union. His spirit, compassion and determination will continue to float the halls of DHS long after he leaves.”

For his part, Ngassam said, “although we are here all together recognizing and celebrating our successes, we must keep in mind that our job is not over.

“The task at hand is not easy and pretending that it is will only be detrimental to the success we as a community have already achieved. I’m well aware that not everyone will agree with our views or support our causes and I accept that. The question is, would you rather be challenged when you express ideas that you don’t fully believe in to attempt to make people who oppose you more comfortable, or would you rather take criticism knowing the things you state or do is what you truly believe is right?

“This award only marks the beginning of my journey to eradicate the bigotry that’s still present in our society,” said Ngassam. “Even though there’s still a long way to go, I have the audacity to continue to condemn injustices in order to imbue justice every step of the way.”

The other young humanitarian honoree, Torres, “has spoken out on behalf

as well.”

Wright’s selection for the Thong Hy Huynh civil rights advocacy award followed five years of unceasing and conscientious advocacy for the community’s most vulnerable populations, including people of color and the unhoused, according to Partida.

Wright “has succeeded in changing the tenor of discussions between community members and police around these issues,” the mayor said. “She has successfully advocated for the implementation of programs to better serve the most vulnerable in Yolo County’s criminal justice systems.”

Finally, the Thong Hy Huynh award for excellence in community involvement went to the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter.

“For the past 13 years, during the coldest months of the year, the IRWS has provided both evening and morning meals, friendly conversation and a warm place to sleep for up to 25 folks at a time,” said Councilman Will Arnold.



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