

Staff Report

DATE: May 2, 2023
TO: City Council
FROM: Carrie Dyer, Management Analyst
RE: 2023 Thong Hy Huynh Awards Recipient Recommendations

Recommendation

Ratify the following nomination recommendations from the Human Relations Commission subcommittee for the 2023 Thong Hy Huynh Awards.

- 18 and Over Category –
 - Naomi Davis
 - Natalia Deeb-Sosa

- Under 18 Category –
 - Ruvi Rajapaksha
 - Bailey Ren-li Paquette
 - Mattias Rowenbale

- Community Group Category-
 - Empower Youth Community Service Club; Ethnic Studies of Yolo Academy

Fiscal Impact

There is a cost associated with each individual award (certificates), the perpetual plaque and the awards reception. These costs are included in the 22-23 budget.

Background and Analysis

The Human Relations Commission annually seeks nominations for the Thong Hy Huynh (“*tong hi win*”) Awards. The awards are presented once each year in memory of the stabbing death of Davis High School student Thong Hy Huynh on May 4, 1983. The award was established to raise awareness about and to honor community members whose actions exemplify the goals of diversity, community, social justice and equal rights.

At the May 26, 2022 meeting of the Human Relations Commission, the commission began review of the nomination and selection process to determine if changes were needed for the 2023 awards. After much review, the Commission determined to change the categories for the 2023 awards cycle.

This year the three award categories included:

- Under 18
- Over 18
- Community Organization supporting the Davis Community

There are unlimited qualities that support an individual or organization being nominated. Examples include:

- Significant efforts in
 - Promoting civil rights and/or civic engagement
 - Promoting positive human relations in our multicultural and diverse community
 - Improving the quality of life in the City of Davis for residents and visitors through:
 - health promotion
 - human services
 - housing
 - education
 - employment
 - cultural awareness
 - peaceful means of conflict resolution

At the March 23 meeting of the Human Relations Commission, the commission created a subcommittee of commissioners and ex-officios to review the nominations and provide the recipient recommendations directly to the City Council for ratification. The awards will be formally presented to the recipients at a ceremony on May 16.

Per the nomination guidelines, there may be multiple recipients in each category. The subcommittee, made up of Chair Mvondo, Commissioners Muhammad and Willson and Ex-Officio Snow, are recommending the following nominations to be recognized as a 2023 Thong Hy Huynh recipient.

These excerpts are taken directly from the nominations

18 and Over Category

Naomi Davis:

We are nominating Naomi Davis for the City of Davis Thong Hy Huynh Award because we feel she deserves recognition for the tremendous leadership, support and guidance she has provided the Davis Senior High School Black Student Union week after week, year after year.

Davis Senior High Black Student Union members respect and love Naomi as she inspires each and every one to rise above circumstances and prejudice and create a POSITIVE life for themselves – whatever that may look like. And as they honor themselves, they repair and enrich our damaged culture. She brings HOPE to our students, which we all so desperately need right now

Natalia Deeb-Sosa:

Natalia has been devoted to this integral yet marginalized community of Davis for years. While she is comfortable bringing their issues to the halls of power like the DJUSD school board, the Davis City Council, and the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, she has unwavering faith that they can come to those halls of power themselves and make their needs known. She can step forward to insist on their

inclusion, and she can step back to support their voices and ensure they are heard.

Natalia's service is an exemplar of the kind of work that the Thong Hy Huynh awards seek to highlight and encourage. The Spanish-speaking immigrant community is often out of the awareness of the larger Davis community, while comprising a significant percentage of it. Natalia is not only bringing their issues to the attention of our city and county leadership, she is paving the way for them to speak directly to that leadership in their own voices.

Under 18 Category

Ruvi Rajapaksha

Ruvi Rajapaksha is a student in 8th grade at Holmes Junior High who has already demonstrated considerable dedication to the well-being and success of diverse students across Davis Joint Unified School District over several years. Her first foray into district-wide system change came in the form of participating in the Student Ethnic Studies Committee of the Ethnic Studies Task Force as a 6th grader from Willet Elementary. In this capacity, even as the youngest member of the group she spoke clearly and forcefully about her desire to see all students represented in curriculum and respected in all classes.

She then developed ... a brand-new Anti- Racism Club, The Morning BELE, continuing with an anti-racism agenda of inclusion and belonging for all students. The members meet regularly to build community, understand each other and the school environment, to discuss issues of school climate.

Bailey Ren-li Paquette

Bailey Ren-li Paquette is a 17-year-old junior at DSHS. She grew up in the Philippines and Singapore before moving to Davis in 3rd grade. Last year she founded a club called DHSCC (Davis High School Community Club) with the intent of making community service fun and meaningful for high school students. Boasting 120 members, she has been able to rally throngs of volunteers to help with organizations and events like The Yolo County Children's Alliance, Race for Justice and The Walk to End Alzheimer's. Bailey attained non-profit status for her club and was awarded a grant from the Chang Foundation. Bailey's club is entirely student-led and student-run.

Mattias Rowenbale

Mattias has consistently demonstrated the values that the Thong Hy Huynh Memorial Award is promoting. Mattias has consistently worked to advocate for fellow students, his community and the environment. Mattias is a founding member of the Davis Student Union and has advocated for the elevation of student voice in important matters in our schools. Mattias has advocated for gender neutral restrooms and changing rooms at our secondary campuses. Mattias has graciously walked campuses with staff to ensure that the student perspective is heard when working to create inclusive environments. Mattias can often be found throughout Davis leading environmental advocacy efforts in our schools and in the community.

Community Group Category

Empower Youth Community Service Club

Empower Youth is a service club that was started in August 2020 with 12 local teens during the pandemic to help support the children at Empower Yolo's emergency shelter and other families in need. The goals of the club are: to raise awareness about violence and abuse in our community and how it affects children, teens, women, and families; to encourage healthy relationships; to do community service projects/activities and show kids through their actions the importance of helping those in need such as children and vulnerable families..

Empower Youth officers have collectively volunteered hundreds of hours working extremely hard to raise awareness about many important issues that affect youths in our community. At the heart of it all, they are motivated to support the children at Empower Yolo's safe house every month for whatever needs come up for the children and families residing there.

Ethnic Studies of Yolo Academy

The Ethnic Studies YOLO Academy's goals are aligned with those of the Thong Hy Huynh Memorial Award. Ethnic Studies YOLO Academy focuses on awareness of identity and community history, systems of power, resistance movements, and civic engagement. These understandings assist the youth in building community amongst themselves—skills which they can bring to the wider community. There is no other program like this in Davis, or Yolo County.

Ethnic Studies YOLO Academy coordinators, have educated over 20,000 youth over the last 15 years to cultivate positive human relations. They have received ethnic studies, anti-racist, and youth-centered training. They understand the urgency of promoting positive human relations in our multicultural and diverse community. Youth participants of various backgrounds indicated that they felt a sense of community and empowerment, especially as they were recovering from the social distancing caused by the global COVID pandemic.