

Sean’s brief but generous words of welcome were followed by LTC Ernest Minichello’s discourse who compared the Vietnamese experience to that of his amazing Italian ancestors: “I built my presentation around the similarities of my immigrant Italian grandparents experience in establishing themselves in America and Cleveland and how the Vietnamese community have done the same thing. I thanked the community for being here and expressed my opinion that they make great American citizens!”

He was followed by the always eloquent and passionate Community Leader, teacher, Naval officer, and spokesperson Toan Huynh. Here is complete speech:

“Good Morning everyone! As a member of the Vietnamese Community in Cleveland, I am so glad to be here with all of you to celebrate One World Day. I came to live in Cleveland in 1980 as a refugee after the war in Vietnam. I knew and I saw a lot of Vietnamese refugees who became successful while living in this city. I feel like a plant that was placed in good soil where it was able to grow and bloom beautifully. We, as refugees, greatly contributed to the workforce and to all aspects of daily life including society within the city of Cleveland. This cultural garden is a point of pride for the Vietnamese Community to share our beautiful culture with other nations. Here, we can show the strong diversity, and pluralistic of the city of Cleveland. It is



also historical evidence of the contribution of the immigrants who helped make this country magnificent. And it is also an amazing souvenir for our next generations to inherit. I am so thankful in remembrance of our soldiers who sacrificed their lives by fighting for our freedoms so all of us can live a better life. I also thank the city of Cleveland authorities for creating this fantastic garden. Thank you, Ms Giahoa Ryan, Mr. Joe Meissner and the [Friendship Foundation] organization team in making this event successful. Have a great day!”

Mayor Ronald Falconi next addressed the audience. He said, “Thank you very much for inviting me again to this ceremony. I have been here before and this is a very beautiful occasion. You know I am not from Viet Nam, I am from the Philippines. (“Yes,” someone from the audience called out, “but you were with us as an ally in Viet Nam. You contributed medical help as well as information about growing the new rice.”) Yes, you are right. We were with you. I want to again say, how proud I am to join you and I wish this Vietnamese garden every grace and blessing.”

Joseph Cimperman, Global Cleveland President, added his congratulations for the Community’s success on this Garden. He also urged all to remember our Afghan allies and interpreters at this time when they are suffering as the Vietnamese suffered in April 1975 when Saigon fell. Joseph Meissner joined this: “We must pray for



our Afghan friends and America must never desert them.”

Other scheduled speakers included David Thi, the Assistant Coordinator for our Garden; Community Leader Hach Pham; and Pierre Bejjani, President of Cameo who heads up the Lebanese Cultural Garden

A late addition to our speakers was former columnist for the Catholic Universe Bulletin and Vietnam veteran Lou Pumphrey. At the ceremony Lou carried his usual American flag which has a recognized symbol of peace in place of the fifty stars. Here are his painful comments:

I’ve been promoting peace for at least 10 years to people--folks going to Browns games, Indians games, Parade the Circle behind the Art Museum, Blossom Festival Parade in Chagrin Falls, Memorial Day Parades in Shaker Heights. Over the years some people have said to me, “Your flag desecrates the American flag...disrespects the American flag.” And I reply, “Well, I have a different

perspective. I was in Vietnam for a year and from my perspective, it doesn’t disrespect or desecrate the American flag. It respects peace. People who have not been in a war, have not experienced the bitter taste of war, can never ever respect peace to the same degree I do. It just can’t happen.

We all know there is a flagpole above the White House. If I had my way, I would put my peace flag on that pole, but I would fly it above...ABOVE...the American flag.”

The concluding speaker was Dr. Wael Khoury who is the President of the Garden Federation. He spoke, “Thank you for inviting me to address you. Let me congratulate you on all the progress you have made in constructing your garden. It is very beautiful. I wish you all the good fortunes to complete the garden and hopefully that will happen by our next One World Day in 2022. Thank you again.”

After the speeches, Director Gia Hoa Ryan had some very special nominations and awards. The first was for the Senior Ambassador for the Garden, Mr Hach Pham. He was awarded a beautiful sash which Ms. Ryan and Ms. Dung Luong draped over his shoulders while we all clapped. The second



was Ms. Ryan conferring a Certificate of Excellence on the Youth Ambassador, Julia Duong. She also received a beautiful purple colored shoulder sash. Here were Julia’s words of acceptance:

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity. I

have seen the amazing things you have done for this garden, and I hope to help it grow. Here at the cultural gardens, it’s our duty to spread the beauties and joys of our traditions. Traditions are tradition for a reason, and we must help them stay. It is incredible how you (the Vietnamese Cultural Garden Committee) have brought Vietnam here. Again, thank you for everything.”

Mr. Hach Pham then gave his thank you for the nomination and praised the Friendship Foundation and Director Ryan for all she has done. Without her leadership and financial contributions, there would be no garden.

Director Ryan thanked him and praised the audience for all their support over these many years. “Today we will have a Forever Remembrance table by the center statue which talks about our fun-raising activities, some of our caring donors, and the bricks and stones available for individual and family inscriptions. I again want to thank all of you for your support. We now must form up while Tran and Dung prepare us for the parade.

We had expected two buses which would carry our marchers to the Irish Garden that is at some distance from the Vietnamese garden.

We have many mature citizens who beg to march in the parade. We do not want them to experience any health problems.

So we all waited... and... waited... and waited.

No bus. Even Johnnie Wu, the overall Director for One World Day, drove by and could not help us find a bus.

Finally Tran and Dung decided, “Let’s go. We are tough Vietnamese and we can make the walk to the Irish garden.”

So we set out, Attorney Meissner being carried in the cyclo driven by Tan, and others walking on the street proudly carrying our new street banner flashing the words “Vietnamese Cultural Garden.” These are surrounded by Bamboo branches and the picture of our Lady’s statue.

Our people walked the two miles, only getting a ride toward the end from two golf carts. Assisting the parade was Little Michael, Saigon restaurant Owner Buon, and many others too numerous to list here.

We arrived just in time for the beginning of the parade. Meanwhile President Kha played traditional and inspiring Vietnamese music from his modified bike. This kept all our spirits up.

All along the parade people cheered our Community, our banner, and our many Vietnamese flags of the three red stripes on the

gold background.

At the end of the parade we dispersed back to our garden to a waiting feast of foods, coffee, and sweets.

At the center of our garden, we had a large poster with this message:

FOREVER REMEMBRANCE OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASSISTING US WITH THE VIETNAMESE CULTURAL GARDEN.

THEY HELP WITH THEIR DONATIONS, THEIR LABORS AND ACTIVITIES, AND THEIR INSPIRATIONAL SUPPORT.

ALL OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES WILL BE REMEMBERED FOREVER AT THE GARDEN SITE.

WE HAVE 30 CONCRETE STONES AND 254 BRICKS IN THE GARDEN CENTER AROUND THE MARBLE

STATUE OF THE VIETNAMESE WOMAN. SHE REPRESENTS ALL WOMEN. (CURRENTLY SHE IS “UNDER CONSTRUCTION” IN VIET NAM. ALL THIS SCULPTURE

WORK HAS BEEN GREATLY SLOWED DOWN BY THE COVID THREAT.) WE WILL BE HAVING YOUR NAMES CARVED INTO THE CONCRETE

STONES AND BRICKS.

TO THE RIGHT OF THIS NOTICE, HERE ARE SAMPLES OF THE BRICKS, THEIR SIZE, AND THE INSCRIPTIONS. ALL OF THESE PEOPLE AND MORE HAVE ALREADY DONATED.

YOU CAN SEND YOUR DONATIONS TO FRIENDSHIP FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN VIETNAMESE, 2234 WEST BOULEVARD, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44102

Here are the names we had on the bricks as samples of inscriptions. (These are real donors’ names.)

DR GERHARD FLEGEL
DR. MARTIAN TALIAK
DR. RIEDESEL
JUDGE RAYMOND PIANKA
MRS KAREN PIANKA
DOAN FAMILY
JASON LIN AND FAMILY
JUDGE MICHAEL JACKSON
ATTORNEY PATRICK McLAUGHLIN
COL FRANK KING AND FAMILY
ATTORNEY DENNIS SEAMAN

Many stopped and read this explanation. Many then donated for the garden

While all of this was taking place, we were participating in the “Passport Program.” Young people would stop by the educational table where they were welcomed by Betina Meissner, Malinda Dang, and Attorney Thomas Similie. Upon answering our three challenging questions on Viet Nam, her people, her geographical location and some language words of Vietnamese, a sticker of the Vietnamese flag was glued into their passport books.

The day ended at 6:00 in the evening as everyone helped to take down all the equipment and flags, and carefully filled our U Haul truck. Once we had trekked back to our west side locations, everything was gently unloaded and stored up

for next year’s One World Day which is only 364 days away.

“Thank you,” Executive Director Ryan ended the day. She stated. “A gigantic thank you to all and I invite everyone to make frequent visits to our garden during the year.”

