

# Hhh-mong?

by: Choua Vang

Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin.

“Hhh-mong? What’s that?” This is a common reaction of people who are unfamiliar with the Hmong culture. Usually, if a Hmong person is present,

he/she will politely correct the pronunciation by explaining that Hmong is pronounced with a silent “h”. Indeed, most people have never heard of (not to mention encountered) this small Asian ethnic group from the mountains of Laos, Thailand, and China. In elaboration, the Hmong culture is comprised of a distinctive tonal language, colorful traditional outfits, bland food, and other idiosyncrasies. During the Vietnam War, many of the Hmong in Laos aided the CIA in combat against Communist forces and therefore were obliged to flee their native country after the end of the war. Many of the Hmong resettled in western countries such as France, Australia, Canada, and most notably the United States. Currently, the Hmong population in the United States is estimated at about 160,000 with concentrations in

Believe it or not, however, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has its very own Hmong Student Association (HSAC). HSAC was started up in the spring of 2001 and is the first recognized Hmong Student Association in the state of North Carolina. The organization strives to promote cultural awareness of the Hmong people both on the UNC campus and in the community beyond. To achieve its purpose, HSAC engages itself in a wide variety of cultural-awareness activities such as traditional dance performances at the Asian Student Association’s Annual Journey into Asia show, sponsorship of information booths at various cultural events, and fellowship with other student organizations throughout the state. In addition, HSAC also enthusiastically pursues community service activities, some of which include campus blood drives, holiday favors for nursing home residents, and volunteerism at local soup kitchens.

Because most Hmong refugees who immigrate to the United States do not possess a

“Perhaps more than ever, the Hmong are beginning to demonstrate the fact that they too can embrace progression while reflecting on their culture.”