

Thinking Outside the Box

Chinese Software Professionals Association allows professionals to stay on top and broaden outlooks

BY STEFFI LAU

In July 1988, a group of Chinese American software engineers came together through a common interest in technology and with little access to business-focused help and networking. The Chinese Software Professionals Association was born.

Today the South Bay-based organization has 4,500 members and even a small following in China. The group has become an or-

ganization from which its members can learn to broaden their horizons, transitioning from software engineers to entrepreneurs and learning about industry trends.

Scott Tse, the group's co-president, describes the association as being at the intersection of software issues and Asian American issues.

Knowing that many of their members have become interested in doing business with Asia, and that companies have begun look-

ing at Asian American professionals as bridges to Asia, CSPA has had events educating its members on these aspects.

"China is becoming such a hot topic," Tse said. "We've discussed how it is related to Chinese American engineers in Silicon Valley. Many are thinking about how they can start businesses targeting China."

This entrepreneurial mindset is a big part of CSPA, as many of its members are entrepreneurs or thinking of starting their own

businesses. In June, the organization held the first event of its @Venture series, an entrepreneur program aimed to address the challenges of starting businesses. Upcoming is an event called "Managing Global Teams for Success."

CSPA is driven by a quality-focused mentality. "We have to get the best speaker, irrespective of whether the person is Asian or not," Tse said. "It's the only way to share the benefits of industry with members."

The organization itself has widened its scope and audience over the years — though it started as a group of Chinese American engineers, now many non-Chinese and even non-Asian professionals show up to the group's events; some events attract up to 50 percent non-Asians.

"We focus on technology issues that affect everyone, people with diverse backgrounds, not just Asian Americans," Tse said.

While the events are primarily educational, the group also celebrates Asian culture; one of the most popular events is a networking mixer around Chinese New Year. The organization is even



Members of the Chinese Software Professionals Association

philanthropic — it recently began a drive for Chinese earthquake victims and has pledged to match cent-for-cent the amount raised.

"I think most Chinese software professionals work too hard," said Henry Wong, a venture capitalist and adviser to CSPA. "They don't have the chance to go out and get fresh air. CSPA lets them get fresh air, think outside of the box and get outside of Chinese traditional thinking."

Wong, who has started five successful businesses, has certainly pushed the limits of tradition.

"Traditionally, Chinese are very conservative. They do their job and go home," Wong said. "But you can innovate and find new ways of doing things."

Portrait of Prince Zhu Youyuan in the ceremonial uniform (detail), probably 1521. Avon. Ming artist. Hanging scroll, colors on silk. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

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