

APA Campaign Mastermind Eyes Office

Political activist Paul Fong blazes trail for Asian Americans — and now for himself

BY STEFFI LAU

Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach.

After capturing the Democratic vote to represent California's 22nd Assembly District, political science professor Paul Fong is proof that the sentiment is a myth.

"I have to practice what I preach," Fong laughed.

In the June 3 primary election, Fong won 38.1 percent of the Democratic vote, beating Kris Wang, Anna Song and Dominic Caserta. In the largely Democratic district, confidence is high that he will reign over his Republican opponent Brent Oya, who has no political experience.

While it seems as if multiculturalism has only recently become hip, the 55-year-old Fong has lived and breathed the Asian American movement for the past 35 years.

Affectionately known as the "godfather" of the Silicon Valley Asian American community, Fong has been a political force behind-the-scenes, helping hundreds of all races campaign and win and nurturing four dozen Asian American candidates. His mentees have scored positions as mayors, council members and school officials.

Fong has earned a long list of endorsements from officials at all levels — from Congress to council members — many of whom Fong personally helped.

Fong's activism began when he was a San Jose State University student discovering the Asian American movement.

"I had an identity crisis back then," Fong said. "I was everything but Asian."

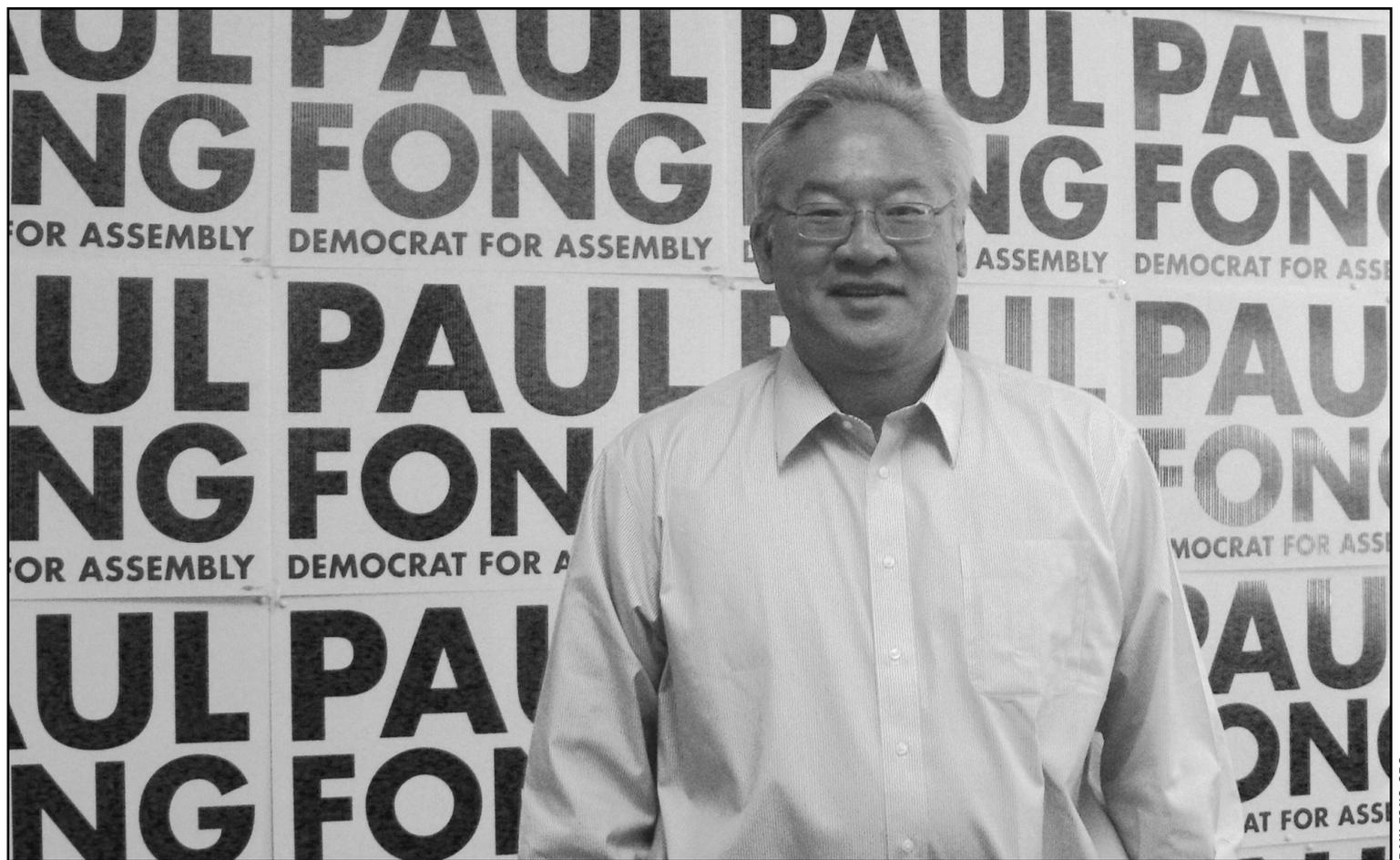
Fong emigrated from Macao with his parents when he was 3. At Sunnyvale High School, where Latinos were 40 percent and Asians were a mere 5 percent, Fong faced Asian stereotypes of being too passive. However, Fong, a star quarterback, fought these stereotypes. Looking back, he calls himself a "tough guy" who thought he was "brown."

"I rebelled against being Chinese. I tried to assimilate, but instead, I acculturated because my parents insisted that I retain my roots. So in the end, I was multicultural," Fong said.

High school connections sparked his political involvement — his relationship with Congressman Mike Honda dates back to when Honda was a teacher at Sunnyvale.

"I met him in the barrio. He out-reached to the boys in the 'hood, and I thought, 'This is a pretty cool Asian guy,'" Fong said.

Fong got involved in Honda's campaign when Honda decided to run for San Jose Unified School Board in 1980. This was Fong's first support of an Asian American, as he had previously focused



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on educating white or other candidates on Asian American issues.

After learning the nuances of campaigning, Fong became a recognized name and contributed to hundreds of campaigns.

Mountain View Vice Mayor Margaret Abe-Koga has been a mentee of Fong for 15 years, since she graduated from college. "Probably every Asian American official in Silicon Valley can attribute their success to him," she said.

Former Cupertino Mayor Michael Chang, another Fong success story, calls Fong a "mastermind" of campaigns. "He's willing to revolve his life around the community, even if it means subsuming his work life," Chang said.

Time is an issue for Fong, a community college trustee, full-time professor at Evergreen Valley College and owner of Flower Cottage, a flower business (the backroom has often served as a campaign war room). Fong grew up working in his parents' nursery

and built the Flower Cottage to continue the family business.

A father of three children (Sean, 22, Nicole, 18, and Sydney, 16), he anticipates having even less time with his family if he is elected, but says, "I think they see it as a sacrifice for the community, which is like the extended family."

Campaigning, while old hat for Fong, has not come without surprises — Wang, his opponent and former Cupertino mayor, was one of his mentees.

"She broke the mentoring cycle," Fong said. "It was a double-edged sword. On one hand, I was proud that I had helped make this person. On the other hand, I didn't think it was good she run against her mentor."

Fong still plans to continue advocating Asian American empowerment, saying, as a true son of flower growers would, "We planted the seeds, but the coming generations need to grow the trees. That's my calling in life."

Testing Positive: Now What?

What do your hepatitis B test results mean, and what do you do if you test positive?

Family nurse practitioner Jian Zhang will answer those questions in a free upcoming workshop, "Hepatitis B: Am I at Risk?," on July 19 from 10 a.m. to noon at Excelsior Health Services located at 888 Paris Street. Free screenings and lunch will be provided. A breast cancer awareness seminar will also take place concurrently.

Zhang, who has taught educational hepatitis B workshops for over two years, said that the most common question she encounters involves interpreting test results.

The hepatitis B surface antigen (HepBsAg) indicates whether one has chronic hepatitis B or is a carrier of the disease, while the hepatitis B surface antibody (anti-HBs, sometimes also written as HepBsAb) tells you if you are protected against hepatitis B, according to Zhang.

If both your HepBsAg and anti-HBs blood tests are negative, then you are not protected and should get vaccinated. You are protected from hepatitis B if your HepBsAg is negative and anti-HBs is positive.

Patients should ask their doctors for these blood tests if they are unsure if they have the disease. There is also a vaccine, a series of three shots given over six months, that can protect people for life.

Zhang will also discuss medical



care and applying for low-cost medication. While monthly fees can cost up to \$800, a patient assistance program can reduce the fee to \$12.

Zhang knows firsthand the fatal effects of hepatitis B; her close friend learned too late that he had the disease, after being diagnosed with liver cancer. He passed away within six months.

"There is no healthy hepatitis B carrier. If you have the disease, you must follow up with your doctor to get monitored and treated," she said.

The workshop is part of the Chinese Hospital and Chinese Community Health Plan's collaboration with the S.F. Hep B Free campaign to target and educate the Chinese community in San Francisco.

For more information on screenings or educational classes, call (415) 677-2488. For more about the S.F. Hep B Free campaign: sfhepbfree.org.