

UPDATE

Bi-monthly Membership Newsletter Reporting on US - Vietnamese Current Events and Culture
 Issue 5 September/October 2000



Mission Statement: GSVA is committed to promoting positive relationships and mutual understanding between the people of Greater Seattle and the people of Viet Nam. We will accomplish this by promoting contact and cooperation in the areas of education, humanitarian work, trade and the arts.

**THE GREATER SEATTLE
 VIET NAM ASSOCIATION**

PO Box 23282
 Seattle, Washington 98102
 (206) 322-1178
 gsvawausa@aol.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Son Michael Pham: President
- Ming Khue Dang: Vice President
- Tyler Du Lam: Treasurer
- Sally Schultz: Secretary
- Teri Conti, Editor
- Judith Henchy
- Gary Johnson
- Lea Ann Kaplan
- Jim Kern
- Trang Tu

National Adoption Month

By Cindy Ptasnik

All across the nation in November, much energy is devoted to raising the level of public awareness of the hundreds of thousands of children around the world waiting for forever families. Attention focuses on adoption as a positive way to build families and the need of so many children for loving, permanent homes. During this time, there are many community activities where those interested in making a difference in the life of a child can go for information and support.

In the Puget Sound region, "adoption fairs" and conferences draw hundreds of couples and singles wanting to learn more about domestic and international adoption. If you're just beginning to check into adoption as a way of starting or adding to your family, you will want to attend one or

more local adoption fairs this fall. Adoption agencies, attorneys, social workers, and adoptive parent support groups are all in attendance to answer questions and participate in presentations. These events are wonderful for people interested in gathering information. Since there are a number of resources in the same place at the same time, it is easier to compare and contrast options.

13th Annual Kitsap Adoption Information Fair Saturday, October 14, 10 am to 2 pm Silverdale Methodist Church, 9982 Silverdale Way NW. For more info call Marilyn at 360-697-2997

2000 Adoption Information Fair Sponsored by the Washington State Adoption Council Sunday, November 5, 9 am to 2 pm, Overlake Hospital Conference Center. For more info call Mark Demaray at 206-682-4000.

Continued on page 2

GSVA to Host a Fall Forum on Adoption

Adopting from Viet Nam: Making an Informed Choice

By Teri Conti

This fall, GSVA will be hosting an informative program for people interested in adopting a child from Viet Nam. Presenters include: Betty Tisdale, known as "The Angel of Saigon," for her success in getting over 200 orphans lifted from Sai Gon at the end of the Viet Nam war; Lea Ann Kaplan, founder of the Washington Chapter of Families with Children from Vietnam, a non-profit group which offers support to families in all stages of the adoption process; Dave Ptasnik, from Americans Adopting Orphans, and; Cathy Gentino, single adoptive parent.

Our goal is to provide a well-rounded program that will empower prospective parents with information and resources about the adoption process. Presenters will address: issues unique to adoptive parents and children; the special needs

Continued on page 2

CORPORATE MEMBER BENEFITS

\$100 Level: Receive a bimonthly issue of The Update, and have a biography of your organization included in our Corporate Members' Corner.

\$500 Level: In addition to the benefits cited above, you will receive two free seats at any exclusive GSVA function. This includes our business breakfast series, special membership functions, and two seats at our Annual Dinner & Benefit Auction.

\$1000 Level: In addition to the above benefits, your organization will be given a Corporate Table, seating 10 guests of your choice, at our Annual Dinner and Benefit Auction.

*** UP & COMING EVENTS ***

October 25

The World Trade Club invites you to Celebrate "The Voyage of Trade," at its Tenth Annual World Trade Reception. Congressman Jim McDermott will be the speaker for the event. 5:30-7:30 pm Pier 66. To register, call 206 283-9400.

November 5

GSVA's hosts "Adopting from Viet Nam: Making an Informed Choice." This promises to be an informative and inspiring event, and is free of charge. (For more details, see the article on page 1.)

November 15

GSVA's Fourth Annual Benefit Dinner & Auction. Bell Harbor International Conference Center. For Sponsorship information, contact us at 206-322-1178, or by email at info@seattlevietnam.org. Look for information coming your way soon.

Fall Forum on Adoption

Continued from page 1

of single parenthood; the adoption process, and; resources available for adoptive parents. A question and answer period will follow the presentation. Representatives from community agencies that serve adoptive parents will be available to address questions during the break, and after the event.

The event will be held on November 5th, from 3-5 pm at 810 Virginia Street (8th & Virginia), in the conference room located inside of the Seattle Police West Precinct Headquarters. This is a free event. Call Gary Johnson at 206-233-8560 or email at gary.johnson@ci.seattle.wa.us for directions. For information about the event, you can also call Teri Conti at: 206-276-2119 or by email at: angelheart2@earthlink.net.

National Adoption Month

Continued from page 1

Adopting From Viet Nam: Making an Informed Choice, hosted by The Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association. Sunday, November 5th, 3 pm to 5 pm.

(For more details, see article on p. 1)

The Internet is also a good source of information for prospective adoptive parents. Several good sites to explore are: www.adoption.org/ www.calib.com/naic/stats/index.html www.orphans.com www.fcvn.org www.comeunity.com/apv/webring.html

*** ANNOUNCEMENTS ***

THANK YOU, DOUG!

The Board of Directors wishes to thank Doug Irvine for his valuable contributions over the last two years. Doug has resigned from his Board position due to the demands of his business.

BI-LINGUAL SPEAKERS NEEDED

If you are bilingual and like helping people, please call American Red Cross Language Bank. We provide interpretation and translation services to homeless and domestic violence shelters, food banks, individual immigrants and refugees, among others. You can use your valuable language skills to help others in person or over the phone, and choose the time, place, and type of service you want to provide. All languages are welcome! Contact: Jhon J. Valencia, Language Bank Coordinator at (206) 726-3554 or languagebank@seattleredcross.org

WASHINGTON, DC

— The Senate and House have voted final approval of HR 2909, a bill that implements the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. Read more about this groundbreaking legislation at www.holtintl.org/update.html



Beth Whitman bids farewell

It's with great regret that the Board bids farewell to Beth Whitman. Beth has been a dedicated Board Member since the inception of GSVA. Her creativity and energetic spirit has been integral to the growth and success of our organization, and to the fulfillment of our goals. We wish you happiness and success in your future endeavors. You will be missed!

Impressions of Hai Phong

By Harry Sharpe

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Patricia Davis
*President Washington Council
on International Trade*

Sue Donaldson

Jan Drago
Seattle City Councilwoman

William Glassford
Bank of America

Mike Lowry

Jim McDermott
US Congressman

Paige Miller
Commissioner Port of Seattle

Douglas "Pete" Peterson
US Ambassador to Viet Nam

Valarie Kusuda-Smick
The Boeing Company

William Stafford
*President Trade Development
Alliance of Greater Seattle*

Jim Street
King County Superior Court

Note: Henry Sharpe is a senior planner for the City of Seattle, and GSA member, who is on a three month assignment to assist the Hai Phong City People's Committee in preparing for a "Resource Cities" program. The program will engage Seattle and Hai Phong in a series of staff exchanges during the next two years.

September 15, 2000

I have been in Viet Nam for a month and a half and it is time to say something pithy about the experience. When I think about it in these terms, it is hard to know where to get a handle on the experience, so here are some rather random observations.

Hai Phong or Haiphong

Hai Phong is much more developed than I had expected. The signs of poverty certainly exist, but are not as extreme as I had anticipated. For example, Seattle has significantly more street beggars for a city of the same population. There is poverty, but it is more evidenced in the rural areas and in other parts of Viet Nam. Hai Phong is an industrial city in one of the richest agricultural regions of the country. It draws a significant number of migrants. There is undoubtedly significant underemployment, but most people seem busy as workers or vendors (many as both).

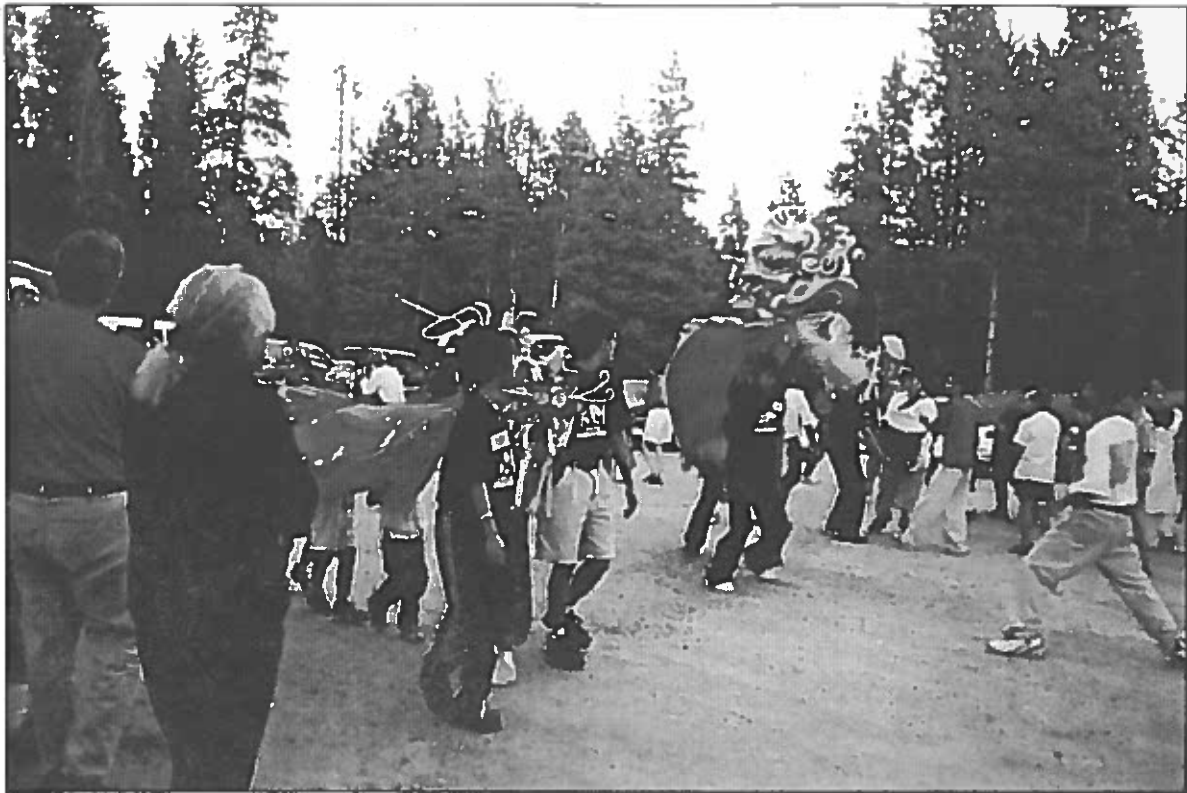
Income levels are low; the national average is under \$400 per year, but there is a significant difference between urban and rural incomes. Urban incomes may be as high as \$1,000 per year. Official income for government workers at most levels is \$40 to \$50 per month; teachers make \$30 per month. There is, however, a thriving economy that supports 157,000 motorbikes in

Hai Phong (noting that new motorbikes cost between \$900 for local manufacture, and \$2,100 or \$2,400 for the more popular and most common models). Compare that salary to the car price ratio in the US.

Vietnamese People

Most of the people have been very friendly and many have gone out of their way to be helpful. No one has been difficult or openly unfriendly. Vietnamese language is very difficult; fortunately a surprising number understand English and even speak a few words. Youngsters on the street consistently offer "Hello," and a few other greetings. For the youth, a responding "Hello" is far preferred to a Vietnamese "Chao". There is also the occasional "Bonjour" from another generation. The Finns I live with are frequently greeted, (often disparagingly), in Russian – a particular affront for them, but I have not recognized that mixed greeting and insult. The Russians were not popular here. First, there was no economic benefit and there was reportedly substantial arrogance. The Russians here were either cheap or poor (or both). The smallest bills in circulation here, (there is not coinage), are derisively referred to as "Russian money." Many youngsters are curious, anxious to try out their school English or communicate somehow. Even the generation that would have been directly effected by the American War, (and Hai Phong was severely bombed and damaged, and still has pill boxes and bomb shelters in evidence), often smile and wave when I am walking the streets or riding my bicycle. There have not been too many Americans here in Hai Phong, three, I believe (someone helping to

Continued on page 5



Dragon Dance at Vietnamese Heritage Camp

A Trip to Vietnamese Heritage Camp

By Lea Ann Kaplan

My husband Keith and I adopted our son, Theodore Hieu, as an infant in 1998 in Hoa Binh, Viet Nam. This summer we all traveled to a Vietnamese Heritage Camp in Colorado.

I decided we should attend the camp after reading emails from families who attended last year. We would learn more about Viet Nam and its culture, and meet other adoptive families through workshops and social events.

Colorado Heritage Camps, Inc. organized their first Vietnamese Camp just last year and have been facilitating camps for adoptive families for many years. Other heritage camps include Chinese, Indian, Latin American, African-American, Russian and Korean.

On August 18, we flew to Denver, then drove 4000 feet up into the Rocky Mountains to Snow Mountain Ranch for three days of fun and learning. This

resort has many cabins and lodges with private baths, a cafeteria and many recreational activities that families could participate in when they weren't attending Heritage Camp events.

Forty-two families attended the Vietnamese camp this year, with more than 70 children divided into groups by grade level. Young adults from the local Vietnamese community, some of them adoptees, led each group of children as counselors. The children got very attached to their counselors, wanting to sit and eat with them even when they weren't in workshops.

The children attended age appropriate workshops with the counselors on Saturday. These included crafts, learning some Vietnamese language, songs and folktales, and learning about what it is like to live in Viet Nam. In the Vietnamese Village area, each group of children elaborately decorated

a dragon made from cardboard boxes, red paper and long red tail.

I saw all of the children gaining so much from attending this camp. I overheard a boy, about eight years old, complaining to his parents that he never wanted the camp to end. Children socialized together during meals and played outdoors between workshops. They learned more about Vietnamese culture and formed friendships with other children who have similar life experiences.

While the children did activities with the counselors during the day on Saturday, the adults attended workshops, including presentations about living in Viet Nam, adoption issues children may have, the philosophy and religion of Viet Nam and a Vietnamese cooking class. Keith raved about this class all day, and felt too full from the food they cooked to

Continued on page 5

Vietnamese Heritage Camp

continued from page 4

eat dinner that night. A Vietnamese adult adoptee and her mother spoke with families, and Cherie Clark had a book signing for *After Sorrow Comes Joy*.

On Saturday evening the children participated in a dragon parade led by experienced dragon dancers from Denver's Vietnamese community. The children paraded around under the dragons they had made during the workshops, following the big colorful dragon. Parents lined up outside to watch with cameras flashing everywhere. Many children wore the traditional outfits from Viet Nam. Theo wore his embroidered red silk outfit.

The group of young people from Denver then demonstrated the traditional dragon dance, with drums beating like a dragon's heart, the dragon's head popping up straining

against the fabric of its tail. They also performed Vietnamese folk songs and dances, wearing bright traditional outfits. During these performances, the children lined up on stage and sang the Vietnamese song they had learned earlier in the day.

On Sunday, the children made kites while the adults heard the keynote speaker, LeAnn Thieman, author of *This Must Be My Brother*. Her moving presentation related her role in the 1975 "Operation Babylift," and her personal story of adopting her son from Viet Nam during that time.

For another resource, the camp provided a cultural market filled with crafts and other items from Viet Nam, books, music and items related to adoption.

The camp served a traditional Vietnamese rice noodle dish with spring rolls, for lunch on Saturday. We ate the rest of our meals at the main cafeteria that provided food for all of

the guests of the ranch. Meal times presented great opportunities to meet other families, talk and socialize. We met and ate with many different families and discussed similarities and differences in our adoption and parenting experiences. We shared where we lived and how we brought Vietnamese culture into our children's lives. Other parents understood our complicated issues because they had experienced them too. I mentioned our son being the perfect child for our family, and everyone knew exactly how I felt.

I came away from this experience more confident, with parenting suggestions, ideas for fun kids' activities and wonderful memories. The next Vietnamese Heritage Camp will be August 9, 10 and 11, 2001. Contact Pam Sweetser at 303-388-3930 or info@heritagecamps.org or check their website is <http://www.heritagecamps.org>

Impressions of Hai Phong

Continued from page 3

sell shares in State Owned Enterprises and a newly minted teacher). Youngsters are often surprised with the answer when they ask me where I am from. Some step back, but most reach out and smile.

It is an extremely hard working population. The State has recently legislated the workweek at 40 hours to help create more jobs, but the populous puts in long hours and work multiple jobs. Old habits persist in this hard working and well educated country. Underemployment is the norm. Although Viet Nam is moving toward a market economy gearing up for exports, the most fundamental business imperative here is to provide jobs. In business practices, labor is assigned little cost, but capital is extremely scarce. Although the system is geared to provide

jobs, there is significant redundancy. Some State Owner Enterprises are rumored to have substantial numbers of employees who are not required to show up for work, or at least not on a five-day-a-week basis. The importance of providing employment makes some of the movement to an economy with a market driven sector difficult. A lot of work takes place on the weekends, particularly construction and public works. From the standpoint of life in the city, the weekends are a busy as other days, and the children are in school on Saturdays.

With the new trade agreement, the expectations from the United States is not only markets, but a infusion of capital directly to projects that the Vietnamese have on their master plan list, including a lot of public infrastructure.

Noise

Noise is the essence of Hai Phong. Auto drivers have one hand on the horn and use it incessantly to let others know where they are and that they want the right-of-way. Scooter and moped drivers respond to the cars and announce their presence and intentions to the other Honda drivers, and to bicyclists, cyclos and the pedestrians. Their left thumb rests on the horn button. This symphony is overlaid on the occasional truck or bus, announcing with absolute certainty, their right to which ever lane or piece of the street they want, usually in the opposite lane. The horns are all different pitches and tones, and the vehicles, moving at different speeds, waver the tones and blend them together. There is seldom a silent second on the streets, even in the more

Continued on page 6

Impressions of Hai Phong

Continued from page 5

reserved portions of the city where the government departments are located.

At the lower end of the pecking order, the bicyclists and the cyclo drivers are disdainful of the drivers with horns, never making eye contact, and moving across the path of overtaking oncoming vehicles with aplomb. Of course, every such action is the occasion for another horn blast. The quality of the driving is outstanding, precise to the centimeter.

Noise tracks the daily cycle of life. The day begins with a burst early in the morning, about first light (5:15 am), as people go to market and to exercise. The traffic portion of the street symphony builds to a peak as workers leave for their jobs to arrive by 7:00, 7:30 or 8:00 am in a pretty orderly fashion. There is a late morning lull, punctuated by distinct horns, with each tone clearly identifiable. As the smells of the street vendors signal the arrival of the lunch hour, traffic increases dramatically. Traditionally, the Vietnamese go home for lunch. This is their time, and just like the United States, personal time make drivers more impatient than they are on their way to work. The cycle repeats itself as workers return from their lunch break (two hours). Streets are very quiet during lunch – the least busy street scene at any time during the day.

Interestingly, noise pollution from factories is the environmental issue cited most often. It is a wonder that the populous is not deaf, much less able to hear anything else over the traffic noise. There are State workers with bicycles loaded down with the most trivial of trinkets and with radios and loud speakers that travel the streets keeping the people informed of the latest rules, news and health tips. There

are also pole-mounted speakers in some areas that blare forth.

Water

All meetings include bottled water. There are, of course, glasses, and most of the glasses still have their factory stickers on them, even though some are slightly worn. Occasionally the glasses, like some other things here, are wonderfully out of place. One director served his water in Hollywood style with "Goofy Season's Greeting" glasses.

The municipal water system is quite progressive and one of the water infrastructure successes in the developing countries. They took an interesting route after riots in 1993. Starting at the ward nearest the treatment plant, they replaced pipes and installed meters and charges for water. As the improvements reduced loss, the new pipes increased pressure, and the meters made water a commodity, there was better pressure and more water for the balance of the system. More users were happy and the methodology was repeated in other wards. They also developed and heavily used the ward system for staffing the consumer services of the water company. Water tests say that the water is 95% coliform free, but the Finns here working on the system's infrastructure don't drink the water.

We hope you've enjoyed Harry's rich account of life in our sister city, Hai Phong.

Ideas for articles may be submitted to Teri Conti at P.O. Box 27545, Seattle, WA 98125 or at: angelheart2@earthlink.net.

ADVERTISING RATES:

NUMBER OF ISSUES	RATE
1	\$ 60
2	\$ 120
3	\$ 171
4	\$ 219
5	\$ 259
6	\$ 287

DEADLINES FOR ARTWORK ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Jan/Feb	January 17
Mar/Apr	March 17
May/June	May 17
July/Aug	July 14
Sept/Oct	September 16
Nov/Dec	November 16

Artwork must be black and white and camera ready. Original artwork, laser copies, a diskette or business card can be submitted.

Questions: Call Teri at (206) 525-3650 or email her at: angelheart2@earthlink.net

Second Chances

By Cindy Ptasnik

Ever had your back against the wall? Maybe you chose the wrong path or things just didn't go your way. Whether of your own making or not, you're in deep and you'd give anything for a second chance. An opportunity to make a change for the better, to begin anew.

Not everyone is presented with a second chance when it is needed. And it is very rare for a single action to be the answer for a group of people with vastly different problems. However, there is a phenomenon that brings solutions to people from all walks of life. It crosses generations and cultures, and connects hearts. While not a panacea, adoption gives a second chance to birth parents, children, and adoptive parents. Particularly with foreign adoption, second chances can be life-changing for all involved.

The Birth Parents

For single birth parents surprised and overwhelmed by an unexpected pregnancy, adoption can mean a chance to protect their future. Stakes can be very high, particularly in developing countries like Viet Nam and China where it may be difficult for a woman with a child to find a man willing to marry her.

In Viet Nam, where family size is not restricted by the government, in addition to out of wedlock births, it is poverty and illness that often prevent children from being raised by their birth parents. When a fourth child is born to a family that can barely feed three children, that baby is often surrendered to the care of a feeding center or orphanage. Thus, adoption is a pressure valve that allows a way to preserve the lives of every family member.

China's "one child" policy, while curbing the population and easing pressure on the food supply, coupled with a

cultural preference for male offspring, has created a burgeoning orphanage system full of little girls in need of parents and homes. Married couples risk fines and penalties, loss of social privileges, and future security by exceeding population regulations.

The Children

Children are born every second of every day. Most are welcomed into their families with great rejoicing. Unfortunately, some are not. They enter the world and are greeted with adversity. Sometimes the difficulties are so great that the family cannot remain intact and hard choices must be made.

Orphaned or abandoned by their families of origin, babies often enter orphanages without names or known histories. Almost all may spend their entire childhoods in an institution never to know the love of a family of their own. Caregivers in these places, while compassionate, are no substitute for a mom and dad.

Though their physical needs may be met, many children do not thrive in orphanage settings because they cannot endure the stress and emotional deprivation. The mortality rate in some orphanages can exceed 50%. Children are in desperate need of families to help them escape this all too real threat and be able to reach their full potential.

Life without a family is usually pretty bleak. Being an orphan still bears a stigma in Asian cultures. With little education and no family connections to help them, once orphaned children reach their teens and leave the orphanage, the only home they've ever known, their chances at anything but a menial job are pretty slim. Girls are sometimes forced into prostitution to survive.

Adoption offers these children not only a chance to live, but to have a life. A life filled with love, security, and self-

esteem. A sense of belonging to a forever family.

The Adoptive Parents

For those fearing that they might be forever childless, adoption is a second chance to have a family. Fortunately, infertility has taught many people that there is a difference between the desire to be pregnant and the desire to parent. However, this revelation comes to some only after they have spent tens of thousands of dollars on unsuccessful medical intervention.

Adoption presents a true alternative, and is often the best solution for singles to parent without pregnancy or a partner. Being a single adoptive parent is becoming more commonplace in the US. Some single men and women aren't stopping with just one adoption. While missing the role model of one parent may add challenges to a child's life, gaining just one parent eliminates far more challenges than it creates, compared to growing up in an orphanage.

More and more, experienced parents are turning to adoption after their birth children are grown and out of the house. Adoption gives still vital and active mature parents another chance to raise children based on the successes they had with their other children. Often these parents are much more relaxed and playful with their parenting than first timers.

Three groups of people, joined in a solution that benefits all involved. Adoption brings us all together, giving us second chances at life, love, and happiness.

Cindy Ptasnik is the co-director of Americans Adopting Orphans, a licensed child placing agency that gives second chances. With offices in the States of Washington and Missouri, serving families all over the country, Americans Adopting Orphans helps couples and singles adopt infants and children from Viet Nam. Directors David and Cynthia Ptasnik are the parents of two Chinese-born children.

Membership Benefits:

- Receive our bimonthly newsletter to stay informed about happenings here, and abroad, regarding issues pertaining to Viet Nam.
- Attend our popular Business Breakfast Series, where guest speakers share their experiences of working with, and in, Viet Nam.
- Attend events like barbecues with people interested in Viet Nam.
- Learn how you can contribute and participate in GSVA projects.

MEMBERSHIP DUES:

Individual member: Student/low income...\$10
Friend of the Association...\$25 Philanthropist...\$100
Corporate member: Associate partner...\$100
Senior Partner...\$500 Executive partner...\$1,000

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____
Address _____ Apt. _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____
E-mail _____
Type of Membership _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Your membership contributes to GSVA projects AND is tax deductible.

Seattle, WA 98102
PO Box 23282

