



Lee Ann Kim with actress Sandra Oh



San Diego Asian Film Festival



Lee Ann Kim with actor George Takei



PAYING MORE THAN LIP SERVICE TO Going Global

by Henry DeVries

Former San Diego TV news anchor Lee Ann Kim has a few well chosen words for job seekers and career climbers. She can vocalize the speech in one of four languages.

"In any job today employers are looking for people who are bilingual, trilingual and quadrilingual," says Kim. "We now live in a global society. Speaking foreign languages just makes you more marketable."

Kim, a high-profile anchor at KGTV/Chanel 10 for 13 years, covered many big stories including the Cedar Fires, Santana and Granite Hills high school shootings, the Heaven's Gate suicides and the Republican National Convention. She left the station in 2008 and today is making news as the founder and driving force behind the San Diego Asian Film Foundation, the presenters of an annual film festival that has attracted more than 100,000 movie goers.

Kim believes you can never start too soon to learn the vocabulary of the global economy.

"My husband, Louis Song, and I are both ethnically Korean and we just enrolled our two children in a magnet Mandarin Chinese school" says Kim. "They are in Mandarin immersion so by the time they graduate from high school and speak fluent Chinese they can go anywhere in the world because that is the number one language in the world."

Kim was born in Seoul, South Korea and emigrated to Chicago at the age of three. In addition to Korean, English and Spanish, she also "speaks" American Sign Language. She might need to learn Mandarin to keep up with the kids.

"I learned most of my English from television shows like *The Electric Company* and *Sesame*

Street, says Kim. "I can sing all the jingles from TV in the '70s."

She studied Spanish for four years in high school and was a journalism major and Spanish minor at the University of Maryland. She chose Spanish for practical reasons that paid off in her career.

"I knew if I was going to pursue journalism then Spanish would be a better language than German, French or Japanese," says Kim. "In many of the TV markets, like Houston and San Diego, if you are equal to someone else on your resume but you speak a second language like Spanish or Chinese, then you are the one they will hire because we now live in a global society. That second language is extremely important."

Continued on next page

In any job today employers are looking for people who are bilingual, trilingual and quad lingual.



Lee Ann Kim, Executive Director, San Diego Asian Film Foundation

Growing up as an Asian American immigrant in the Midwest in the 1970s, Kim says she felt isolated and marginalized. Adults made fun of how her parents spoke (despite her father being an M.D.) and others made her and her three sisters feel that they didn't belong in America.

"I was constantly asked, 'Where did you come from? Are you Chinese? Japanese? What's Korean?' So I grew up as a storyteller answering these questions," says Kim. "My mom, who couldn't speak English well, always told me: 'No matter what you say and do, people don't see you, they see all of us.' My goal through journalism, storytelling and the film foundation is to show people that if we understood that we are really all the same, then the world would be a better place."

Her San Diego Asian Film Festival first began in 2000 as a three-day event at the University of San Diego. Kim had no prior film festival or fundraising experience, but came up with the idea while serving as president of the San Diego Asian American Journalists Association. With the help of filmmaker Mark Arbitrario, film critic Beth Accomando, local journalists, and a team

of passionate volunteers, the festival opened on August 9, 2000 with a sold-out screening of *The Debut* and ended with the Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner *Girlfight* with director Karyn Kusama in attendance. About 3,500 people attended the first festival, showing there was a demand for independent cinema.

The second film festival moved into a commercial theatre venue (Hazard Center in Mission Valley) and took place in September 2001, two weeks after the 9/11 tragedy. The 80 films that premiered provided a way for San Diegans to heal through stories that promoting tolerance and cross-cultural understanding. Soon after, the festival achieved 501 (c)(3) status, becoming the San Diego Asian Film Foundation (SDAFF) in 2002. Since then, the foundation has premiered more than 1,000 films and videos from around the world. Celebrities in attendance have ranged from Margaret Cho and Grace Park to George Takei and MC Hammer.

Kim has received numerous community service awards for her commitment to mentoring young people. The advice she gives to those that she mentors and employs is to get involved

in your community as a volunteer, stopping making excuses about what you don't know, and surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.

"You know what sucks? To be the smartest person in the room," jokes Kim. "That's because you are always telling people what to do and you can never learn. Life is a process of learning. You can never know enough. Always have people who are smarter than you that you can learn from and grow. I always hire that way too." ■

Learning a Language Puts the World in your Hands.

UC San Diego Extension offers foreign language courses from Arabic to Spanish, and certificate programs in Spanish and Translation and Interpretation (Spanish/English). Academic credit is offered for successfully completing pre-approved language immersion programs in Mexico and Spain through our Travel Study program. For more information, see page 20.