

By Patrick Ronan | February 8, 2016

*The children and grandchildren of Asian immigrants who arrived in Quincy 30 years ago, are establishing themselves in the culture of the city. Second of five parts.*



*Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC), Quincy, executive director Giles Li talks about the increased needs of the Asian community in Quincy which has increased the number of clients his group serves. November 23, 2015. Greg Derr*

QUINCY -- In a city where roughly one in four residents is Asian, you won't find many on the job at city hall, wearing a police badge, putting out fires, teaching in city schools or exercising their right to vote.

Of the city's 4,170 full- and part-time employees across all departments, less than 5 percent of workers, 201, are Asian.

The number shrinks considerably when schools are taken out of the equation. Among Quincy's 1,079 full-time city hall and public service employees, only 27 (2 1/2 percent) are Asian.

As small as that number is, it's 40 percent greater than during the years prior to 2010 when 16 Asians working for the city.

Quincy is making strides toward inclusion and equity.

"But it isn't there yet, as most communities aren't there yet," said Paul Watanabe, director of the University of Massachusetts-Boston's Institute for Asian American Studies.

In the 1970s, two federal court decrees ordered police and fire departments in communities with a minority population of more than 1 percent to actively seek out minority job applicants until the diversity of the force reflected that of the community. A number of Massachusetts communities had to abide by the decrees, and several are still bound by them.

However, Quincy was never bound by the decrees because its population at the time was less than 1 percent minority. In addition, Asians weren't considered a minority under the decrees, which were focused on blacks and Hispanics.

Of Quincy's 207 police officers, six are Asian, roughly 3 percent of the force. One of the six is a sergeant. Ten of the 203 police candidates on the most recent Quincy police Civil Service list say they are fluent in an Asian language.

Police Chief Paul Keenan said the department can request a list that favors bilingual candidates who speak English and an Asian language, but the department has enough bilingual officers right now.

"We haven't found the need to do that," Keenan said.

Currently, only two of the city's 198 firefighters, or 1 percent, are Asian. On the fire department's Civil Service list, only three of 99 candidates are fluent in an Asian language.



*Asian participation in the election process in Quincy and elsewhere is growing. Many attended a candidate forum at North Quincy High school where there was a simultaneous translation of forum into both Mandarin and Cantonese, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2015 Gary Higgins/The Patriot Ledger*

Mayor Thomas Koch said he tries to hire qualified Asian workers whenever there's an opportunity. For example, he said, there's an opening in the treasurer's office that he'd like to fill with an Asian worker who is fluent in English along with Cantonese, Mandarin or both.

## Reaching out

There are signs that the city is trying to get Asians more involved.

After Koch took office in 2008, he hired Betty Yau, a native of Hong Kong, to work on his constituent services team. Yau, 52, helped found the mayor's Asian Advisory Committee, which creates materials in Chinese that explain some of the city's services, such as trash pickup, how to vote and pay tax bills, parking restrictions, and advisories about upcoming events and meetings.

In 2012, the Asian Advisory Committee started producing "Eye on Quincy," a live show on QATV that shares city news in Cantonese and Mandarin. It's shown on the first and third Mondays of every month at 7 p.m.

Yau said the city has improved its outreach services to Quincy's Asians, but there's always room for more progress. She said the more informed residents are, the more likely they'll get involved.

"What I've been hearing people saying is that Asians are quiet, that we don't voice our opinion," Yau said. "But on second thought, it's like, before we voice our opinion, we need to formulate our opinion. I think that that is the part there's a lack of."

In 2012, the city started printing voting ballots in Chinese to comply with a federal mandate that says non-English-speaking populations of a certain size must have access to ballots printed in their native language.

Voter registration among Quincy's Asian residents has nearly doubled over the past decade or so, from 7.7 percent of all registered city voters in 2003 to 14.7 percent in 2012, according to a study by UMass-Boston's Institute for Asian American Studies.

However, voter turnout among Asians has lagged. In the 2012 presidential election, for example, 49 percent of registered Asian voters in Quincy went to the polls, compared with an 80-percent turnout citywide, according to UMass-Boston. Of the 11 cities and towns in Massachusetts with the largest voting-age Asian populations, only two communities – Waltham and Worcester – had smaller Asian turnouts than Quincy's.

"It's the responsibility for the service providers like us to let people know (that coming to America) is not just about getting a good education and getting a good job," said Giles Li, executive director of Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, which has a location in North Quincy.

"It's also about you getting involved in your community. That means voting, knowing what the issues are, knowing what your government tax dollars are going to. New arrivals have to hold up their end of the bargain."

Restaurateur Jimmy Liang, who ran unsuccessfully for city council three times between 2001 and 2007, said Asian interest in city government may grow now that two Asian-Americans – Noel DiBona and Liang's cousin Nina Liang – have been elected to the city council.

"When you have a public official that's of a certain descent, I think naturally it'll invoke emotions within that cultural group and they'll probably want to come out and participate and do a little bit more," he said.

### **Expanding the comfort zone**

With more second-generation Asian-Americans, like Nina Liang, getting involved and holding positions of power, Asians may feel more comfortable applying for city jobs or joining volunteer groups, city and Asian leaders say.

That doesn't mean Quincy should go out of its way to hire candidates based on race, said DiBona, whose mother is from Thailand.

"I don't get into the affirmative action thing," DiBona said. "I think the best person gets the job."

Lan Ruan, 41, a Wollaston resident who moved to the U.S. from mainland China in 2002, agreed.

"If they can run the city as a mayor or a councilor, we shouldn't focus on their race, (whether they're) the first Asian or Chinese or whatever," Ruan said. "We should look at their ability, their capabilities to do this job."

"If they can run the city as a mayor or a councilor, we shouldn't focus on their race, (whether they're) the first Asian or Chinese or whatever," Ruan said. "We should look at their ability, their capabilities to do this job."

### **WORTH NOTING**

- Of 1,079 full-time city employees, excluding schools, only 2.5 percent are Asian, 96 percent are white, 1 percent are black.
- Of 54 employees identified as Quincy city department heads, only one is Asian: Betty Yau in constituent services.
- Every major city department has an Asian representative who is bilingual.
- There are 2,234 names on the Civil Service waiting lists for laborers. Only 23 are Asian surnames.
- Asians' voter registration share in the city has nearly doubled in past 15 years, from 7 percent of total registered voters in 2000 to 13 percent in 2015.
- In 2015, Nina Liang, whose parents are from China, and Noel DiBona, whose mother is from Thailand, became the first Asian-Americans elected to the city council.
- In 2012, the city started using ballots in Chinese as well as English, the result of a federal requirement triggered by Asian population growth reflected by the city's 2010 Census.
- In the 2015 city election, 28 percent of Quincy Asian registered voters turned out, compared with 41 percent citywide.
- In the 2012 presidential election, 49 percent of Quincy Asian registered voters turned out, compared with 80 percent citywide, the largest gap among 11 communities in the state with the highest Asian populations.

*Sources: City of Quincy; UMass-Boston*