

First MultiEthnic Indiana Conference

April 22, 2008, Sheraton Hotel, Keystone at the Crossing, Indianapolis, IN

Monks with gold sashes and maroon robes surrounded Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, ceremoniously ringing bells as they escorted him to the podium to open the first Indiana MultiEthnic Conference. One monk placed a white prayer shawl around the Governor's neck. The Governor then looked out across the room. Unexpectedly, he raised a camera and took a picture.

"I wish you could see what I see looking over this crowd. I see the future of Indiana, and when others ask me what Indiana is like, I want to show them this picture," Daniels said as he photographed the audience. The first Indiana MultiEthnic Conference, held April 22, 2008, drew 300 attendees from across the state who described themselves as being from 19 countries and 23 different ethnicities.

Governor Daniels was one of several keynote speakers who featured different aspects of Indiana's increasing ethnic diversity and who addressed the issues minorities of all ethnicities face as they become Hoosiers. Butler University President Bobby Fong shared his background as the child of undocumented immigrants in Oakland. Jerome Peribere, CEO of Dow AgroSciences, who himself carries a French and an Argentine passports, discussed how his company can remain competitive globally only if it can attract the very best scientific talent from around the world to Indiana; and make newcomers feel welcome enough to want to live here.

The conference met its goals to educate and share with one another the successes and challenges faced by selected immigrant groups. "We are here to see how we can help each other to better ourselves, the state and – in the end – the country," said Juana Watson, Senior Advisor of Latino and Immigrant Affairs for the governor's office.

More than 25 speakers in 10 morning and 10 afternoon workshop sessions addressed specific issues and challenges facing Indiana in making it a more welcoming state for the growing immigrant populations. The workshop themes included: *Learning About Our New Neighbors, Uncovering MultiEthnic Indiana, Proactive Community Initiatives, Unique Community Concerns and The Entrepreneurial Spirit of the Immigrant.*

Ninety-nine percent of the attendees surveyed asked that the conference become an annual event.

"There is a hunger around the state for this type of Conference," said Carmen DeRusha, organizing committee facilitator from Purdue Extension – Marion County. Keynote addresses from French native Jerome Peribere, President and CEO, Dow AgroSciences and President Dr. Bobby Fong, Butler University, a first-generation Chinese American, stressed the need for Hoosiers to recognize the talents of foreign-born citizens.

Interfaith Prayer Service

Because faith is a key component to the festivals, family and cultural experiences of many ethnic groups, this year it was featured in a special interfaith prayer service. It gave guests a glimpse at the various spiritual beliefs and provided an additional educational element to the workshops. The sampling included Native American, Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Sikh faiths.

(Video Link)

Special music and dance

The conference concluded with culturally diverse entertainment featuring the Barangay Filipino Children's Dance Troup and the Aftab Dance Group.

(Video link)

Keynote Speakers

Governor Mitch Daniels, Indiana

Dr. Bobby Fong, President, Butler University: www.butler.edu/president/speeches.asp

Jerome A. Peribere, President and CEO, Dow AgroSciences

(Video/ links)

Findings of the plenary session

Many groups expressed the need for:

- More access to medical care, including psychological counseling opportunities.
- Local and state policy changes including fighting against anti-immigrant sentiments.
- Sensitivity training of management and associates serving immigrants. The BMV was given as an example, but this includes all citizenry.
- Education of Indiana citizens of the economic importance of diversity and benefits.
- Education of citizens to dispel the stereotypes. For example, that all immigrants are poor and uneducated.
- Willingness of communities to create support systems tailored to specific groups, such as communities that have formed Japanese Saturday Schools.
- More ESL training for youth and adults through organizations within the immigrant communities in addition to what is being done in schools.

Quick Facts (Self described by our survey)

Number of guests: 300

Nationalities of guests: 19

Ethnic groups of guests: 23

Largest profession represented – Educators: 15%
Attendees engaged in business or industry: 10%
Elected officials filling out a survey: 0
Those saying the conference should be repeated annually: 99%

Sponsors by category

Lead:

Eli Lilly and Company
Indiana Civil Rights Commission
Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs

Platinum:

Indiana Department of Labor
Indiana Humanities Council
The Indianapolis Foundation, an affiliate of the Central Indiana Community
Foundation

Gold:

Baker & Daniels
Keystone Construction
NIPSCO (Northern Indiana Public Service Company)
Old National Bank

\$24,500.00

In-kind supporters

Purdue Extension-Marion County, Asian American Alliance, WTHR, Nationalities Council of Indiana, Eye2theWorld, International Center of Indianapolis, Sikh Salsang/Sikh Educational and Culture Society of Indianapolis, and Cardinal Communications.

Quotes to pepper the Web site document

“Indiana must say to all people everywhere, our state needs people if we are to grow and produce new innovations, jobs and talents.” Governor Mitch Daniels

“Indiana must be the most welcoming. We must celebrate our oneness and should not permit barriers between us. In Indiana, on our best day, our differences should not matter.” Governor Mitch Daniels

“Common ground calls for adaptation by both the host and the new sojourner.”
President Dr. Bobby Fong, Butler University

“We must learn that culture doesn’t stop at the borders. Cultural awareness reduces the relational grit that gets in the way of relationships.” President Dr. Bobby Fong,
Butler University

“Wasting human talent is no different than wasting time and materials. ... Indiana must welcome the immigrants because they give more than they take away in social services.”
President Dr. Bobby Fong, Butler University

“Policymakers must help facilitate immigration. Either we facilitate so the brains come here, or companies will go where the brains are.” Jerome Peribere, President and CEO, Dow AgroSciences

“It’s people that interject innovation, passion and imagination everyday.” Jerome Peribere, President and CEO, Dow AgroSciences

“Let us make a place at the table for new friends and old. Share our common dreams and shape a community where the light and labors of each one enhance the gifts and promise of all.” Kanwal Prakash Singh, Sikh community leader and artist

“In America, living our faith and its commandments includes respecting people and traditions different from our own ... and respecting those who do not follow any faith tradition.” Kanwal Prakash Singh, Sikh community leader and artist

What people are saying (Comments from those attending)

“An exceptional conference that gives us all a better understanding of each other.”

“It brought so many cultures together, and we were able to learn some of the similar challenges that we all share.”

“Wonderful conference! I was attracted by the breadth of diverse experiences it afforded and the number of immigrant groups in attendance.”

“A wonderful achievement to have had this conference. It was a happy conference – people were happy to find others with similar concerns.”

“Thank you for giving all of us an opportunity to learn about each other and especially about the growing multi-ethnic communities in our state.”