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## **Nearly 300 gather to celebrate Indiana's first MultiEthnic Conference**

On Tuesday, April 22, Indiana held its first MultiEthnic Conference at the Sheraton Hotel and Suites in Indianapolis. The conference, an initiative of Gov. Mitch Daniels, educated nearly 300 Hoosiers on the challenges, assets, benefits and concerns of our multiethnic population.

"Our first annual Indiana MultiEthnic Conference went well. There is a hunger around the state for this type conference," said Carmen DeRusha, organizing committee facilitator, from Purdue Extension – Marion County.

Registration began at 8 a.m. followed by breakfast and recognition of the lead sponsors, Eli Lilly, OCRA, the Civil Rights Commission and Carmen DeRusha from Purdue Extension – Marion County. Gov. Daniels kicked off the conference with opening remarks, followed by keynote speaker Dr. Bobby Fong, president of Butler University. Fong, a first generation American of Chinese parents, spoke about the need for Hoosiers to recognize the talents that the foreign-born population brings to the state.

An exhibit break and morning workshops followed Fong's address. The conference provided attendees with five workshop themes and a total of 10 morning and 10 afternoon workshops led by 28 speakers. The sessions reviewed a variety of topics ranging from multiethnic education in Indiana, to unique community concerns. Business leaders and administrators had the opportunity to learn how ethnic entrepreneurs have achieved success with their business in Indiana. These workshops assessed the challenges, issues and successes of Indiana's multiethnic communities. Attendants and speakers gained a better understanding of how to embrace and move forward with the multiethnic opportunities that Indiana provides.

The afternoon portion of Indiana's first MultiEthnic Conference opened with a catered lunch and non denominational prayer.

The afternoon keynote speaker, Jerome Peribere, CEO of Dow AgroSciences and native of France, spoke about the need to understand the common bonds that hold everyone together. He recognized a need for mutual understanding among Hoosiers to increase growth in Indiana and keep students who attend Indiana colleges in the state after graduation.

Following the keynote address was an interfaith service, which provided a glimpse of the many faith traditions that grace Indiana's spiritual landscape. Among service participants were: Tony Showa, an American Indian; Rev. Dr. Richard Hamilton; Bro. Benedict from St. Paul's Catholic Center; Dr. G.L. Ahuja, a Hindu from the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana; Ashfaq Lodhi, a Muslim; Arjia Rinpoche, director of the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center; and Giani Pritam Singh and Group, from the Sikh Satsang of Indianapolis.

A plenary session concluded the afternoon workshops, calling for the attendees and speakers to form a plan of action. Gloria Balerini, executive director of ALSE Clemente Center represented the Hispanic Community. Nyein Chang, director of the Refugee Resettlement Program represented the refugee resettlement community. Sally Tuttle, a member of the

Choctaw Nation represented the Native American community. Eric J. Rolle, project manager for Shrewsberry & Associates represented the West Indian Community. Theresa Kulczak, executive director of the Japan-America Society of Indiana represented the Japanese Community. Each speaker brought the prospect to discover and understand our common ground and encouraged attendees to spur on positive change in the state.

“The conference has opened the door for each of us to reflect how we can be the catalyst for making Indiana a more welcome destination for newcomers and those whose roots are deeply embedded in the soil and traditions of Indiana,” said KP Singh, a conference planning committee member.

During the final part of the day, conference attendees were entertained with cultural dances by the young and enthusiastic Barangay Filipino Children’s Dance Troupe and the spirited Aftab Dance Group consisting of five young women.

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The Indiana MultiEthnic Conference is the first event in what is envisioned as a long-term strategy to highlight the ethnic diversity in the state of Indiana and the welcoming spirit of Hoosiers. Gov. Mitch Daniels created this initiative through Juana Watson, his senior adviser for immigrant and Latino affairs, and charged her with bringing this vision to fruition. Judge Gregory Scott, former director of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, endorsed the initiative and worked hand-in-hand with the committee to make the governor’s vision a reality. This event is the result of the hard work of that committee representing at least 25 different organizations from around the state of Indiana and led by Carmen DeRusha from the Purdue Extension – Marion County.

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