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Heritage Day to celebrate legal immigrants' contributions

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The debate over immigration reform introduced Americans to a system choked by backlogs, exploited by smugglers and skirted by millions living in the country illegally.

Forgotten in the heated discourse, some worry, are the immigrants who came legally and graced their new communities with talent and skills.

Chetan Amin says that would describe most Asian-Americans in Northeast Ohio.

"Are we the problem? I don't think so," said Amin, an Eastlake software engineer who immigrated legally from Bombay, India, after years of effort.

"I think people should open their minds to our kind of immigrants - legal immigrants, the educated class," he said. "That kind of immigration should be encouraged."

Amin's view will resound Saturday, July 8, in the Rotunda of Cleveland City Hall, where the Asian/Pacific American Federation is staging its annual Heritage Day celebration.

Amin, the federation president, said the program will honor immigrants and their contributions to the region.

Guest speakers will include Margaret Wong, an immigrant who founded a Cleveland law firm, and author Joseph Meissner, an advocate for Cleveland's Vietnamese immigrant community.

The free program, which runs from 3 to 5 p.m., will feature Asian foods, music and cultural performances.

Finnish museum to open:

Ten years after the Finnish-American Heritage Association formed to preserve the memories of a fading culture, its members will realize a dream.

Ohio's first Finnish museum is ready to open at 1330 West Eighth Street in Ash tabula, near the harbor, in a neighborhood once called Finn Town.

Volunteers built the log building in the style of colonial Finnish homes, which inspired the American log cabin. Inside, exhibits will recall the immigrant Finns who poured into the region a century ago to work the docks, unloading iron ore boats by hand.

"They never made the history books," said Linda Sippola Riddell, a co-founder of the heritage association. But they inspired a museum.

The Finnish American Cultural Center celebrates its grand opening from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Dubious honor:

Muslims and gays top the list of people most likely to suffer discrimination in America, ahead of the poor and blacks, according to opinions expressed in a new national survey.

Seeking the attitudes of America in the wake of 9/11 and the immigration debate, the National Conference for Community and Justice polled people from myriad cultural groups.

Researchers concluded that Muslims have joined gays and lesbians as among the most discriminated-against people in society. Find "Taking America's Pulse III" at www.nccj.org.

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