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HSC Annual Harvest Festival

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Bright smiles from Hmong Society Club members greeted guests as they gifted them with colorful flowered pins, a custom done at formal events for welcoming people. Following the autwardly worded acceptance of the gifts, guests took their seats inside the parkway ballroom where tables were set with decorative leaves, pieces of candy were up for grabs and music from Hmong artists like Maa Vue set the mood for the upcoming festivities.

The Hmong Society Club's annual Harvest Festival Friday evening featured Games, dances and cultural revelations. Students, faculty, and alumni gathered in the Parkway Ballroom in the Plemmons Student Union to celebrate Hmong culture and learn about their traditions.

HSC member Terresa Xiong and club president Narida Lor hosted the festival and featured PowerPoint slides about the Hmong language and culture along with Neng Now's YouTube videos. The presentations featured important aspects of Hmong culture. For example, to the Hmong people, the term "Hmong" means "freedom." The presentations also covered the history of the Hmong people's ties to the Vietnam War, as well as showing that America has the

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fourth largest Hmong population. Similarly, North Carolina also ranked fourth in the list of states with the largest Hmong population.

Interactive Kahoot quizzes followed to keep the audience engaged with the information they learned throughout the presentations. Other activities such as a ball toss and rice eating contests kept the audience entertained during the event with the allure of prizes. Games and fun facts weren't all the festival had to offer. There were special performances by the HSC's club president who sang, HSC'S dance group, as well as featured guest performance by Kaptivate, a her name dance group associated with KA.

"We worked really hard for this," said Lor, who mentioned the club has prepared for the event since mid-October.

Traditional foods, such as bamboo shoot salad, chicken larb and Hmong jello were also a feature of the evening and were enjoyed by attendants, like Khadija Fouad, a professor in the biology department. Though she arrived halfway through the festivities, she made it in time to try the dishes and learn about traditional Hmong clothing styles, which were presented during the fashion show. "I don't know anything about the Hmong culture," Foad said. "I wanted to learn more about it."

Alumni were also present, including the man who started it all: Khou Xiong. Xiong formed the club in 2010 with two others, Marlon Thao and Teddy Chang, after he noticed a lack of connection despite other Hmong students being on campus. Even though clubs like ASA were present, he still felt that something was missing.

"I think the only thing that I wanted to happen was to gather the Hmong people together," Xiong said.

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Not wanting others to feel the loneliness he felt, the Hmong Society Club was born. It has been active for nine years and will celebrate its 10th anniversary in Oct. 2020. Though Xiong lives with his family in Hickory now, he and many others show their support for the organization whenever they can by attending events or buying shirts designed by the club.

The Hmong Society Club has made a lot of progress and has grown beyond what Xiong originally envisioned "People are actually doing better than when we first started. When we first started, it was so rusty. We weren't sure what we wanted to do." Now, almost ten years later the club has accomplished what Xiong originally intended while simultaneously surpassing his expectations by becoming more like a community.

"I have faith in them. I hope they continue to go strong doing what they do," Xiong said.