

~ Member Spotlight - May 2020 ~

# ASIAN-AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE *Month*

May is Asian-American Pacific Islander Heritage Month.  
Join RMSAWWA as we celebrate the accomplishments of our members  
who help us accomplish our vision every day:

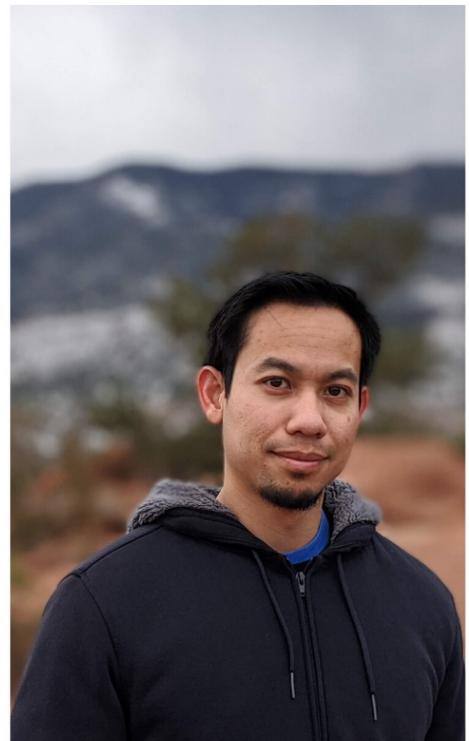
~ ***A Better World Through Better Water*** ~

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Meet  
RMSAWWA Member

**Victor  
Sam**

Project Engineer, Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.  
Fort Collins, Colorado



*Victor Sam is a Project Engineer at Stantec . With community development as a goal he ensures projects are in alignment with the best fit for a community. His role includes facilitating conceptual design discussions with stakeholders to evaluating process design and bridging client's interests with the creativity of the design team and the skills of the contractor. He has experience in water quality analysis, water and wastewater process design, environmental and agency permitting, process pilot testing, modeling, and delivery of construction projects.*

**How and why did you get into the water industry?** When I was a kid, I spent hours in the yard watching water and how it moves through tiny ditches and insects dug into the earth. I would experiment by flooding these drainage ways and watch the water flow through and infiltrate through the soil. I was fascinated about how water moved and also by how much water can change. How the water on the ground became dirty as compared to the water out of the garden hose and then in the winter the water would come down in the form of ice crystals. I knew there was much to explore with water!

When I was asked what I would study in college I knew it would be something that involved water and the environment. Environmental engineering combined my strengths in chemistry and my curiosity about the environment and “how things worked” all in one field. As I progressed through my classes and got involved with several student engineering groups where I had the opportunity to talk to industry professionals and participate in several student design competitions. This was when I knew water and wastewater was where I wanted to make my impact in the world. When I finished my masters, I was hired by an engineering consulting firm to be a team member in their water group.

**What is one of your proudest accomplishments?** A year out of college, I was asked to start a pilot program for the new [Society of Asian Scientists & Engineers \(SASE\)](#). The SASE is an organization dedicated to preparing and support Asian heritage scientists and engineers for success in the global business world. The SASE promotes campus and workplace diversity, discussion forums, and positive contributions to the communities we are in. At the time, SASE was comprised of a few dozen student chapters and had no official professional chapter. With a small team of professionals who were former student members we started the Colorado Professional Chapter of SASE. We had to learn how to start a non-profit organization in compliance with State and Federal regulations in addition to providing valuable programming for our members. Since then we helped SASE grow to now over 100 student and professional chapters, mentored hundreds of students, and supported our community with volunteer hours at various charities.



**What roles have you had with RMSAWWA or AWWA?** I started my involvement as a student at Colorado State University (CSU) by linking up the CSU Environmental Engineering Society student organization with the Rocky Mountain Sections of AWWA and WEF. I was involved through several student design competitions and organizing networking meetings and activities for our members. Since then, I've been part of the young professionals group as membership chair and helped increase student and young professional involvement in the annual Rocky Mountain Water Conference (RMWC). This year, I am the technical programming co-chair for the 2020 RMWC.

**What is something you would like to share about your heritage?** My family were among the thousands of Vietnamese boat people who fled Vietnam at the end of the Vietnam War. This was when water was the element of unknowns and dangers for my family. They were at sea for nearly a week with no food or freshwater, threats from bad weather and pirates before they reached a refugee camp in Hong Kong. My parents and older brother eventually settled in the United States working multiple jobs to support family still in Vietnam. My parent's harrowing journey moving from city to city in Vietnam and risking their lives for a better opportunity coming to the U.S. is my drive to be the best I can be.

Though my parents settled in a new home, it was important to keep their cultural identity. We only spoke Cantonese at home and celebrated the many customs and holidays of the Chinese and Vietnamese culture. I grew up as a minority through school having to go through the English Learning program and being different from my peers but I am grateful for my upbringing. I think that living in two different cultures intertwined broadened my view and outlook of the world from an early age.

**Describe your personal interests:** One of my favorite things to do is cooking and sharing it with others. You can say its one of the ways we can all come together and celebrate our humanity. I connect with my heritage by cooking traditional Chinese and Vietnamese dishes I learned from my mom. There's something special about being able to replicate a dish that makes you feel at home. Mine is my mom's steamed minced pork patty with rice. When it's cooking, the room fills with the warm and familiar aroma and the task of cooking makes you appreciate the love and care that's put into it. I can also travel the world through my kitchen replicating dishes from my travels or just trying out something new. When I'm not cooking, you can find me biking on the trails or on a nature hike up.

**What would surprise people to know about you?** Once a year, you can find me in a full Panda suit raising money for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) with the Panda Espresso Racing Team. Our caffeinated panda themed car brings lots of attention at the 24 Hours of Lemons endurance race at the High Plains Raceway. In the last few years, the team has raised nearly \$1,000 for the WWF with the community while celebrating low budget car racing, pandas, and craft beer.

**What is an interesting project you've worked on?** The project was a wastewater treatment plant expansion which involved increasing the capacities of existing processes such as the aeration basin, clarifiers, and digesters. The most interesting part was the project delivery method, Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR). This delivery method allowed for the owner, engineer, and contractor to come together in the early stages of the project to design, plan out the project, and agree upon a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) for the project. Though this method requires more upfront costs to the client, it can save them on time and give them a better understanding of the effort required. I was assigned as the resident engineer doing site inspections, responding to submittals and questions from the contractor. In addition to design and construction coordination, we were able to assist the client with funding and were able to figure out some construction and design savings throughout the construction phase of the project. The CMAR team came up with ways to apply the savings to do additional improvements to the treatment plant that was not initially budgeted. I found the collaborative environment of the project delivery method very rewarding and learned valuable skills in being an effective collaborator.

## VICTOR SAM'S AWARDS

### 2016 Minority Engineer of the Year

National Society of Professional Engineers,  
Colorado

### 2012 Best Poster Winner

Fresh Ideas Poster Competition,  
RMSAWWA

**Anything else you'd like to add?** If an opportunity arises where you can really apply your passion and interests, don't be afraid to ask to incorporate it to your job, organization, or personal life. At times we have to create the actual opportunity ourselves. Come up with reasons why you want to do something, the benefits, and lasting effects of its success. Give this plan to those who can support you. Be like water, adapt to your environment and be persistent and you'll eventually find yourself where you want to be.