

Speech Delivered by Minnesota Senator Founj Hawj on the occasion of the July 13, 2019, Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting of the St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden at Phalen Regional Park, St. Paul, Minnesota

Hello Everyone. Thank you for joining us at this auspicious event.

A whole year has come around from our groundbreaking last year to today, where we now have the Ai-Wan-Ting (Late Lovers Pavilion) here as a backdrop to our beautiful willow-bank landscape.

Thank you with sincerity to everyone who has been a part of the Phase 1 Construction of our St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden. Our culture and community partnerships will continue onward to the Hmong Cultural Plaza as our next phase.

One more time, I call out with gratitude to the indigenous people and their ancestors, the original caretakers of this land for keeping this place in harmony with nature and now harmonious with wetlands on the other side of the world.

This is a blessing in disguise as I proclaimed before, that fate has brought this Friendship Garden here to the East Side where it has historically been home for immigrants and now it is home for the largest Hmong-American community in Minnesota.

As a Minnesota State Senator of Hmong descent, I cannot be more content to have this ancient replica of peace and tranquility, made from the home of our ancestors to be placed here in the district that I represent.

We all know that over 240 years ago, my Hmong ancestors left China to Laos in our own trail of tears. And we all know that our small group of people also survived the recent conflict of Southeast Asia to be here in the great United States of America, and now settled in the Land of Clear Blue Water, Minnesota as named by our Lakota family.

Today, we are the cultural fabric of St. Paul, and among the stewards and caretakers of this lake and this land. Our progress for all will be determined by our principle-driven leadership, our cultural collaboration, the pursuit for education and economic investment.

While the meaning of this Friendship Garden varies from one person to another, I for one see her as a knowledge gateway between our two sister-cities, St. Paul and Changsha. We have so much to learn from each other to strengthen our relationship and social-economic growth, as well as giving our children the possibility to see beyond their current surrounding.

As I said before, fate brought this Friendship Garden to the Eastside. So allow me to be metaphorical for a moment - what is the chance of a stone from the same block that was carved into the sculpture of our civil right leader, Martin Luther King Jr., the man who said

“I have a dream,” - what is the chance of that split rock landed here in the Eastside St. Paul and turned into a beautiful face of “Meditation”.

It was this Meditation sculpture that progresses to the Ai-wan-Ting pavilion and the Friendship Garden that we are here to celebrate their completion.

Here in the East Side, we are proud of green spaces, our parks and recreation areas, our diversity of people, our hardworking families, and our pride of helping others in need. Although America is still far from Dr. King's dream and Eastside St. Paul may be an example of that inequity, let's not be discouraged but remain hopeful.

We will grow together with our surroundings as a multicultural community, and hope that others will come along to grow with us here in the Eastside-St. Paul.

When you're here at this Friendship Garden, may you find peace and tranquility. May you also find love, hope, and comfort, and may all who come here, come for friendship and unity.

May God bless our two sister cities, may God bless our new shelter here, and may God bless America.