



Chinese American
Community of Fort Lee

In Memory of

YAU,
SHAK
WAH

CONTACT

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In Memory of Shak Wah Yau

Shak Wah Yau was born in Guangdong, China in 1946. During his childhood, he grew up with very little. Despite not having much, he understood the value of an education. When his family moved to Hong Kong during his early adolescence, he seized the opportunity to finish his secondary education and attend college. He earned two college degrees, one in education and the other in engineering.

However, Shak Wah's aspirations did not stop there. He also wanted to go to the United States to get a graduate degree in engineering. While saving money to pursue his studies abroad, he worked as a middle school teacher. During that time, he left such an impression on some of his students that years later they sought a reunion with him in America. They expressed their heartfelt thanks to him for being a wonderful teacher and for the guidance he provided them.

In 1975, Shak Wah was finally able to go to the United States to pursue his master's degree in Civil Engineering. After two years, he received his degree and was hired as an engineer. Shak Wah loved being an engineer. In fact, he worked for the same company for over 30 years. He started as a junior engineer and eventually with hard work and determination advanced to be the chief of his department. While working at his company, he joined its Chinese American Association, and even served as its president for some time.

During his spare time, he spent several years teaching Chinese to the youth of New York City on the weekends. It was at this weekend school where he met his wife. Together they had three daughters. One of the things that he and his family looked forward to every year was their summer vacation trip. They created many fond memories during those annual trips. In addition, Shak Wah and his wife wanted to make sure their daughters also learned the value of an education and the importance of giving back. Each of his daughters have since graduated from college and have all chosen careers in public service.

Shak Wah knew he was very lucky to have been able to come to the United States to receive a higher education. As a result, he used his position to help sponsor his relatives to come to the United States so that their children may also get a chance at a higher education in this country. Being considerate and putting others first was very true of his character. It did not matter how busy he was or the



time of day, if any family or friends needed help, he would make time for them.

After retiring, Shak Wah went back to the rural village where he was born to complete a very important and personal project. He strongly believed in tradition including the one in which you honor your family name and ancestors. He used his structural engineering knowledge to help oversee the construction that was being done to rebuild his family's ancestral house. He devoted endless amounts of time and energy to help make sure the house was rebuilt correctly. When it was finally finished, he was overjoyed.

Unfortunately, soon after this accomplishment, Shak Wah was diagnosed with cancer. After a brave year-long battle, Shak Wah passed away in June 2019.

Although he had achieved the so-called American Dream, he never took it for granted. Nor did he flash it. Rather he lived simply and believed in never wasting. It was all just part of his character – to be hardworking, humble, and giving. Shak Wah would have been deeply humbled and honored to know that a scholarship for education was named in his honor.

