

Good afternoon and welcome to our collection opening ceremony at the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University.

We are honored to be joined by our good friends at the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation of Austin Texas who are our co-hosts for this event.

As most of you know, since 1989 the Vietnam Center has been collecting and preserving the history of the American Vietnam experience and now has the largest archive of related historical materials outside of the National Archives.

Under the leadership of Dr. Jim Reckner and the many veterans, scholars and supporters of the Vietnam Center, we established early a policy of preserving the history of all aspects of this experience, to make sure that the history of all sides and all participants are represented in our archival collections.

Until three years ago, however, our archive collections were woefully deficient in one important area – the experience of Vietnamese Americans. It was in late 2004 and early 2005 that the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation and Vietnam Center discussed the possibility of working together to address this gap in the historical record. In March of 2005, Mrs. Nancy Bui, president of the VAHF and Dr. Jim Reckner, as director of the Vietnam Center, signed the historic

memorandum transferring the papers of the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association. It was with great humility that we accepted this important collection with the responsibility of processing, preserving, and making it accessible to researchers in perpetuity. This collection is equivalent of the Ellis Island papers for the Vietnamese Diaspora that fled Vietnam in the 1980s and 1990s.

As a teenager, I remembered first learning of the plight of Vietnamese people fleeing Vietnam as boat people. Not realizing the profundity of the experience at the time, I met a young Vietnamese man who left Vietnam in the early 1980s as he worked for my father in his dry cleaning business in Massachusetts. I have often wondered what became of that quiet, hard-working, and unassuming young man – where he is today, what he is doing – is he happy and has he become as successful in life in the US as so many of our Vietnamese American friends here today.

That, I think has been one of the most rewarding parts of working with Nancy and the VAHF – to witness the indomitable spirit of men, women, and children who left everything behind in Vietnam in the hopes of creating a better life in a distant land. I am inspired by every story I hear from them, cherish every

friendship. I will never be able to adequately express to them the depths of my gratitude both for their contributions to our country and, more personally, for trusting the Vietnam Center and Archive to be the home for this remarkable collection. It is our honor to be working with the VAHF and many other Vietnamese Americans to make sure that many future generations of their grandchildren will be able to know of their sacrifices and courage and will know more about the tremendous history and heritage that is theirs.

I would like to thank all of you for joining us today. It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce Dr. Jim Reckner, founding director of the Vietnam Center and executive director of the IMCDR.

Thanks to:

Special Thanks to Ms. Khúc Minh Thở and the founding members of the FVPPA who had the presence of mind to preserve this remarkable set of materials. We are deeply indebted to you – as are countless generations of Vietnamese Americans who will seek out this collection to answer some of life's most important questions – who am I and why am I here?