

Hmong Institute: Hosts a Noj Tsiab (pre-new year) celebration to instill a sense of normalcy for the community during the pandemic

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MADISON, WI—The Hmong Institute is hosting the Hmoob Kaj Siab's Noj Tsiab (Pre-New Year) Celebration on Thursday, November 18, 2021, from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at 4402 Femrite Drive, Madison. Noj tsiab pronounced "naw chia" is the meal held the night before the Hmong New Year festival begins. Noj Tsiab and Noj Peb Caug (New Year Festival) are traditionally celebrated after the harvest season on December 30, lunar calendar. The Noj Tsiab tradition constitutes ritual activities such as a hu plig (soul calling), lwm qaib (bless the new year while wash away all negative energy with the old year), giving thanks to the ancestor's spirit for a good harvest and for keeping the family healthy. A meal or feast is then served to the guests. While the Noj Tsiab is to reflect and give thanks for the past year while the New Year Festival is a time to celebrate and welcome the new year. The Noj tsiab and New Year Festival enable the Hmong community to strengthen social ties and maintain cultural identity.

Peng Her, CEO of The Hmong Institute states, "We had to cancel the Noj Tsiab celebration last year due to the pandemic. Most of our elders have been living in isolation and missing their peers. Now that the elders are vaccinated, we were able to reopen Hmoob Kaj Siab. Elders are able to see their peers and go on fieldtrips again. We have a lot to celebrate. By hosting, we hope the Noj Tsiab will bring a sense of normalcy to our community, but more importantly to be able to reflect and celebrate what we have."

Cultural activities at the Noj Tsiab celebration will consist of a *“hu plig”* (*soul calling*) perform by a Hmong elder, musical performances and game competition. Guests will be able to participant in the *“tuav ncuav”* activity (rice pounding to make Hmong mochi which involves turning sweet cooked into sticky rice mass (mochi) by using two large wooden hammers to pound on the cooked rice in a hollowed-out log). The sticky rice mass (mochi) is formed into pancakes, grilled, and dipped into molasses before eating. Elders will play the traditional game of *“pov pob”* ball tossing and have a fashion show to showcase the different Hmong clothes. Hmong clothes tell what region of Laos you are from and what dialect you speak. There will be a *“tuj lub”* (top spin) competition to see who can spin their top the longest. Elders will perform a traditional Lao dance, play traditional Hmong musical instruments such as the *“ncas”* jaw harp, and sing *“kwv txhiaj,”* a traditional Hmong poetry song. A potluck lunch will be shared together after we recognize three staff from 2nd Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin and a retired staff of Hmoob Kaj Siab.