

- CHRIS ROBERTS:** Parades of Hmong children dressed in sparkling, silky, traditional costumes and filing into the Saint Paul Civic Center have become a familiar sight every Thanksgiving weekend. Whenever children pass in the lobby, you can hear the rustling of beads and tin coins, which hang down from their robes, vests, and hats. 19-year-old [INAUDIBLE] attempted to explain the historical significance of the clothes after consulting with his mother. [INAUDIBLE] says 2000 years ago, a Hmong King lost his sons in a war. And to cheer him up, the people created what has now become the new year celebration, complete with fancy costumes.
- SPEAKER 2:** I think it's just for decor, decorations, especially to look nice for the King. Having silver-- because before in the old days silver was a form of richness or money or just having something. And although most Hmong families were rural, they farm for a living, to show the King some respect and some honor, they would have on some-- this is like formal, it's like a tie and suit in American.
- CHRIS ROBERTS:** Others define the holiday as something akin to Thanksgiving, a time to rest and relax after the annual harvest. [INAUDIBLE] who chairs the festival this year, says it has something to offer every generation.
- SPEAKER 3:** This new year have a courtship for the youngster to choose each other, let's say the single man and single woman, and this is important for those young youngsters, and also for gathering for the older people, that they work year-long, year-round. And this is the time to rest and visit relatives, friends, et cetera.
- CHRIS ROBERTS:** On the floor of the Civic Center, you'll find Hmong teenagers in rows, males on one side, females on the other, tossing a ball to each other. It's a courting ritual in which the young man throws a ball to a young woman. And if she tosses it back, they can begin a conversation. What 14-year-old [INAUDIBLE] likes about New Year's is the comfortable environment in which to explore old customs.
- SPEAKER 4:** When you're here, you could be Hmong, and then you could do all your old traditions and everything. But when you're out to school, you mostly have to be half American and half Hmong. So I'm happy that we have a new year to celebrate our Hmong traditions.
- CHRIS ROBERTS:** The Hmong New Year's festival continues through Saturday at the Saint Paul Civic Center. 15,000 people from as far away as California and Pennsylvania are expected to attend each day. This is Chris Roberts, Minnesota Public Radio.