Documentary on Vietnamese American entrepreneur David Duong returns to Bay Area after 8-city tour

The documentary traces David Duong's refugee journey, family resilience and rise in recycling as Bay Area screenings and festival selections continue.



David Duong - The King of Trash on the Big Screen

OAKLAND, CA, UNITED STATES, September 14, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- David Duong, the charismatic entrepreneur whose family built California Waste Solutions after arriving in San Francisco as refugees, is the star of a new documentary that has drawn strong reviews and is now returning to California theaters.

Tickets for Bay Area and San Jose showings sold out in August after heavy demand from movie-goers and the local community. New screenings are scheduled in Hayward, Dublin, San Jose and Emeryville between Sept. 12 and Oct. 3. Nearly 1,000 people have registered or joined waiting lists across the four events, according to the production team.

> We almost died out there in the ocean. We had only one choice: survive."
>
> *David Duong, Founder and CEO of California Waste Solutions*

The King of Trash is returning after an eight-city U.S. pre-screening tour that drew more than 5,000 attendees in San Jose, Oakland, Sacramento, Orange County, Dallas, Houston, Washington, D.C., and Orlando. The events brought together business leaders, community organizations, California Waste Solutions employees, families and members of the Vietnamese American community.

The Sept. 26 program at AMC Eastridge in San Jose will serve as the film's final VIP pre-screening, with David Duong, members of the cast and director Errol Webber expected to attend. One day earlier, on Sept. 25, the team will be in Utah for the film's screening at the Red Rock Film Festival,

where The King of Trash has been selected for the 2026 festival program.

For some viewers, the documentary offers a window into a refugee experience they may know little about. For others, particularly immigrant and refugee families, the story reflects experiences closer to their own: parents beginning again in an unfamiliar country, children growing up between generations, and businesses built not simply as enterprises but as sources of stability for entire families.



avid Duong speaks to attendees at The King of Trash screening at the United States Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C.


David Duong participates in a guest Q&A following The King of Trash screening in Houston, Texas.

The Duongs arrived with little material wealth but with knowledge accumulated over generations in the recovered-paper trade. In San Francisco, discarded cardboard became one of the first resources they could turn into income. Those beginnings eventually led to California Waste Solutions, creating jobs and establishing a recycling operation that today serves communities across Oakland and San Jose.

A rare glimpse into one of America's biggest immigrant success stories

The King of Trash offers viewers a rare glimpse into the mind of one of America's leading green entrepreneurs.

In the movie, Duong cuts a pragmatic and benevolent figure, building a company that began with a handful of family members into an operation employing thousands of blue-collar workers in California and contributing environmental benefits to his local community.

"We started a business with one pick-up truck, getting a contract with Oakland and expanding that to a contract in San Jose and then getting a massive 50-year contract in Vietnam for waste handling for 7,500 tons per day. Next I want to take this company bigger so we can grow more and be helping more in society," Duong tells the filmmakers in The King of Trash.

San Francisco has long been the subject of criticism for its homeless and waste problems. Duong

was one of the few entrepreneurs who tackled the task head on along with his siblings, parents and wider family. At the time of the company's founding, Michael Duong was only around 10 years old, while sons Danny Duong and Andy Duong hadn't yet been born. Victor Duong tagged along in tow.



David Duong joins guests on the red carpet at The King of Trash screening.



Victor Duong, Kristina Duong, director Errol Webber and David Duong speak with guests during The King of Trash event.

A journey that began with survival
The movie opens with the Duong family in 1960s and 1970s Vietnam, when their property and recycling plants were lost after the fall of Saigon. Twenty-three relatives boarded a small boat and fled by sea. Survival itself was not guaranteed.

"We almost died out there in the ocean. We had only one choice: survive," Duong recalls in the film. The family reached a refugee camp in the Philippines and spent about a year there before they were admitted to the United States. San Francisco became their new home. Sixteen relatives crowded into two small studio apartments in the Tenderloin.

"We flew to San Francisco. My parents tried to go to a non-profit organization to ask for help to rent a place. I remember at the time that we went to Goodwill and my parents brought some of the bunkbeds, and then we put them together in two apartment studios for 16 of us that were living there," Duong says in the movie.

Finding themselves with little work or outside support, the Duongs collected cardboard, office paper, aluminum cans and other recyclable materials from San Francisco streets and businesses. They sorted what still had value, sold the recovered material and used the income to help support the household. By the end of the 1980s, the family had acquired seven trucks and the business began to thrive, earning them a contract from the city of Oakland.

"We went to San Francisco downtown where there's these beautiful buildings. My parents went

through one of the buildings where there is this white office paper and they take out aluminum cans. They said, 'this is gold,'" Duong says in the movie.

Those words help explain the meaning behind The King of Trash. The family was not learning recycling for the first time in America. They were using knowledge carried from a previous life to survive in a new one. Over time that work helped create economic stability. The family established CoGiDo Paper Corporation in Oakland, followed later by California Waste Solutions.

Ironically, given the family's former bitter experiences with Vietnam, they later invested in and founded Ho Chi Minh City's largest waste-disposal business. Vietnam Waste Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of California Waste Solutions launched in 2005, handles more than 6,000 tons of waste per day. The movie depicts that construction in detail, showing how they built the city's largest American-standard waste-disposal facility and began tackling Vietnam's environmental challenges from the ground up.

"We came here to America with bare hands and we started collecting trash on the street. We'd open all the garbage bags and go through them and pick out all the recycled materials, sell, and build ourselves up. With $700 to start with, now we have a few billion-dollar contracts between here, the Bay Area and Vietnam. This is the country with opportunity, but you have to work hard for it," Duong tells a forum of young San Jose entrepreneurs in the movie.

Strong critical reception
The film was screened this weekend at Cinemark Century in Hayward to rave reviews from attendees.
“What I found so inspiring was the message that family is at the center of everything in David Duong’s life and in the fabric of CWS,” said Emily 27, from San Francisco.

“The King of Trash was crazy. It’s hard to believe it’s a true story, and yet it is!” said Brad, 35, from Oakland.
“I would definitely watch it again! I want this on Netflix!” said Rob, 29, from the East Bay Area.

What's so powerful about The King of Trash, according to critics, is that it tells the true story of the Duong family's rise in America without rhetorical flourish or exaggeration.

"The film is about family resilience — a ubiquitous ideal among the thousands of people who left their old lives behind in Vietnam at great personal risk after the 1975 Fall of Saigon ... After a year sustained on rations, the family won passage to San Francisco, cramming 16 relatives into two tiny studio apartments in the Tenderloin. From there, the family would scour the city streets for cardboard and other recyclable materials. The children worked too, after school through midnight," wrote Brandon Pho in the San Jose Spotlight.

"In interviews, Cal Waste Solutions truck drivers and executives wax reverent about their CEO who made a recycling empire out of nothing," Pho wrote.

"At its core, The King of Trash's story is ultimately about turning hardship into long-term community improvement. The Duong family's businesses are guided by the simple principle that nothing, and no one, should ever be wasted," wrote Tom White in The Front Row Daily.

Other reviewers pointed to Duong's influence on the green economy in both America and Asia. "Today, David is preparing his family's business for the long term. He has ambitions to take the company public, expanding its impact in California and Vietnam. Furthermore, he works to ensure that California Waste Solutions and Vietnam Waste Solutions remain aligned with future sustainability demands and global environmental standards," wrote California Waste Solutions' Wendy Nguyen in The Hype Magazine.

In one scene, Duong explains how California Waste Solutions lends struggling and start-up families money to purchase trucks of their own and gives them training to find profitable routes. This, he says, comes from his experience as a struggling refugee starting his own business.

"I always said even all that time ago that one day I would have my own recycling facility and I would help people like us. I would treat them fairly," Duong tells the filmmakers.

Nguyen summed it up in a comment about Duong's late father, who never got to see the Vietnam facility built but advised it would be a good venture to pursue: "Through difficulty, he taught his family that nothing should be wasted: not materials, not opportunity, not potential."

Audience demand brings the film back to Northern California
Demand continued after the first tour ended. Bay Area residents who missed previous screenings contacted the production team seeking another opportunity to see the film, while some earlier attendees wanted to return with parents, children and friends.

The next screenings are:
+ Dublin: Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026, Regal Hacienda Crossings, 5 to 7 p.m.
+ San Jose: Final VIP pre-screening, Saturday, Sept. 26, 2026, AMC Eastridge, 4 to 8 p.m. Audiences will have an opportunity to meet David Duong, members of the cast and director Errol Webber.
+ Emeryville: Saturday, Oct. 3, 2026, AMC Bay Street Emeryville, 5 to 8 p.m.

The Bay Area is where the Duong family rebuilt its life after arriving in America, and San Jose is home to one of the country's largest Vietnamese American communities. For many of those families, the history portrayed in The King of Trash is not distant history. It belongs to people they know.

About The King of Trash
The King of Trash is a 72-minute documentary that uses the experience of Vietnamese American entrepreneur David Duong and the Duong family to tell a broader story about refugee

displacement, immigration, family, work and rebuilding a life in America. Beginning with the fall of Saigon, the film follows the family's escape from Vietnam by sea, about a year in a refugee camp in the Philippines and their resettlement in San Francisco. It then traces the decades of work that followed, including the family history behind California Waste Solutions and Vietnam Waste Solutions.

For screening information, the official trailer and film updates, visit TheKingOfTrash.us.

Wendy Nguyen
The King Of Trash
info@thekingoftrash.us
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YouTube

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