

# YEAR OF THE MONKEY

1-12-2004

Bellingham Herald

## Cultural group welcomes Chinese new year

BY MARY LANE GALLAGHER  
THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

A red and green fabric dragon with a bright yellow head welcomed the Year of the Monkey on kid-size feet at the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association's annual Chinese New Year celebration Sunday.

Parents with still and video cameras jockeyed for best spots to see the feet of dozens of youngsters carrying the dragon over their heads, trailing it through the packed tables at Fox Hall on Bakerview Road, where about 200 people welcomed the new year with a pot luck lunch, raffles, dances and songs.

Chinese New Year doesn't officially happen until Jan. 22, but that's when many people will be celebrating the holiday with family overseas, said David Hung, president of the association.

The Northwest Chinese Cultural Association, made up of about 130 families, serves as a "bridge" strengthening the ties of local families to Chinese culture, said Hung, owner of Hong Kong Garden Restaurant and Oriental Grocery and Bakery.

About 30 families in its membership have American-born parents with Chinese-born, adopted children. Most of the other families are parents born in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other



RACHEL E. BAYNE HERALD PHOTO

**HEAD OF THE DRAGON:** Anna McNabb (left) and Julia Morris, both 7 and students at the Mei Hua Chinese School, hold up the head of the dragon during the traditional dragon dance at the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association's Chinese New Year celebration Sunday afternoon at the Hampton Inn.

# Chinese

Continued from Page A1

countries whose children were born in America. Both groups have a strong interest in making sure their kids get exposed to Chinese languages and culture, he said.

The new year's party is one of the association's biggest annual gatherings, Hung said. The group's other big events are a summer picnic and a mid-autumn Moon Festival. And last summer, about 15 families joined a small bowling league, Hung added.

The association also supports a Chinese school, Mei Hua, now in its second term of Sunday classes for kids in Mandarin language and writing as well as Chinese dance and music. The student body, now about 70, has outgrown its home at the Chinese

Baptist Church, Hung said, and recently moved to Assumption Catholic School.

The school started as a cultural resource for families whose children were adopted from China, said Sophia Tari, one of seven teachers at Mei Hua Chinese School. But now, more and more Chinese-American parents are sending their children to the school as well, she said. The students range from preschoolers to college-age, said Ellen Yang, principal.

The school also has an active parents' group, Yang said. They made the dragon that debuted Sunday afternoon.

"We finished it at 8:30 last night," said Cindy Tjoelker, whose 8-year-old daughter Lianne served as one of the dragon's pairs of legs.

About 20 parents helped make the dragon, said Tjoelker, who got the idea at a Chinese culture camp last summer in Oregon and

thought it would be a good way to include a lot of kids in one activity.

Mei Hua, which means "Beautiful China," is a newly revitalized version of a previous Chinese school, which disbanded, Tjoelker said. She's grateful the school is going again and serving as a cultural source for her family.

"Especially for those of us who have adopted (Chinese children), we want to make these connections as much as possible," she said.

## Welcoming newcomers

The cultural association also works to make new families welcome, said Joyce Bourlier, who moved to Bellingham three months ago from Los Angeles with her husband, David, and their son, Nicholas. Originally from Taiwan, Bourlier said she was worried she and her son would stand out as being different in a small community like

Bellingham.

That's turned out to not be the case, said Bourlier, who said officers from the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association met her when her family first moved to town and introduced her to other members of the Chinese-American community.

"It's great to have this association to feel that sort of feeling of community," she said.

It's also a good resource for parents to share their culture with their American-born children, said

Janny Cunningham, who has lived in Bellingham since 1994 and moved to the U.S. from Hong Kong two decades ago.

"There's a lot of learning to make sure they know their own culture," Cunningham said.

Nicholas Bourlier is already signed up for Chinese school next term, his mother said. He had a year of Chinese school in Los Angeles, she said, and after making friends, decided that going to school on the weekend was all right after all.

"He's quite excited," she said.

Bourlier's husband David, originally from Bellingham, learned to speak Mandarin after meeting his wife, and the family lived in Taiwan for a time. Nicholas became fluent in Mandarin by speaking it at home, but used the language less often after he started preschool, his mother said.

"I think he feels different," she said.

But she hopes the exposure to the language at the school will help keep up his Mandarin, she said.