

Children dance in a preview of Chinese New Year celebrations



DRAGON DANCE: Sylvia Lynch, 8, holds up part of a dragon with her sister Molly Lynch, 5, behind, and other Mei Hua Chinese School students for a dragon dance Sunday afternoon at the Hampton Inn. The dance was part of a Chinese New Year celebration put on by the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association. *RACHEL E. BAYNE HERALD PHOTO*

Welcoming the Year of the Rooster

Kira Millage, The Bellingham Herald

Jan. 1 may have come and gone, but the Chinese New Year is just starting. More than 200 people of various backgrounds gathered in Bellingham Sunday afternoon to celebrate the 15-day holiday at an event organized by the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association.

Other celebrations scheduled

Whatcom County residents have two chances this week to

"We have Chinese people (in Whatcom County) and we wanted to help the community and bring the cultural events and diversity to the community," said Ellen Yang, one of the founders of the Chinese association. "We like to have fun for every kid in Bellingham, not just us."

The New Year doesn't start until Feb. 9, but the association decided to celebrate a little bit early at the Hampton Inn with colorful costumes, dragon dancing, Chinese dancing and traditional Chinese music.

"A lot of the community goes back to Taiwan or China, the People's Republic, for the holiday," said Vikki Farkas, the treasurer of the association and an adoptive parent to Meital, a Chinese girl.

The Chinese association is a group of about 250 people who are Chinese or are interested in the culture. Throughout the year, the group brings new cultural events to the area and offers a way for new immigrants to feel accepted.

"We started it because we feel like we have lots of newcomers and they feel lonely," said association Vice President Debbie Ruther. "We thought it would be so nice if we have a group of people around to help them out."

Yang agreed. And though she thinks there could be "more culture" in Bellingham, it does have "diversity" and "is a nice town."

Farkas, who has been part of the association for five years, said, "The whole idea is we want to be more open in Whatcom County and times have changed and people are very inclusive now."

One of the ways the association has changed is by accepting adoptive parents of Chinese children and creating Mei Hua School, a Chinese school that meets every Sunday.

"We're very grateful to be part of it and to have support for our children from people from where they're from," said Jeanine Bushue, a parent of two Chinese girls and a board member of Mei Hua. "We're not natural speakers, so it's an opportunity for the girls to learn not only the language but also cultural aspects of China."

The school is three years old, and Ruther, who is part of the board, is happy about how people are accepting it.

"The people, they are talking about it and the parents are supportive," she said.

celebrate the beginning of the Year of the Rooster.

Parents and teachers from the Mei Hua Chinese School will discuss Chinese New Year at the Bellingham Public Library children's room at 11 a.m. Wednesday. The event will also include Chinese songs, a traditional dragon dance and red envelopes.

Then Western Washington University's Chinese Student Association will sponsor a "Year of the Rooster" dinner gala Thursday. The celebration will highlight Chinese art and culture with a lion dance, a poetry reading, music, calligraphy demonstrations and an art display. The event begins at 6 p.m. in the Viking Union Multipurpose Room and costs \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door. For more information, go to www.ac.wvu.edu/~csa. For tickets, call 650-6146.

Farkas, whose daughter is a member of the school, is just happy that she is part of the community and able to participate in events like the Chinese New Year celebration.

"The best experience in the world was to have my daughter accepted by the Chinese community," Farkas said. "This community has been very supportive of adoptive families."

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