

Local Association Celebrates Chinese New Year

by **Laurel Larsen**

Whether you are an Ox or a Dragon, a Snake or a Dog, every sign of the Chinese Zodiac is invited to celebrate the Year of the Pig beginning this February. Although your experience with the



Golden Pig. Photo by Russ Allen.

Chinese Zodiac may not venture far from the placemat at your local eatery, the celebration on February 11 is bound to educate and entertain.

The official date for the

Chinese New Year is different every year because it follows the lunar calendar. This year the New Year will begin on February 18. It will be celebrated a week earlier by an event organized by the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association. For millennia, the Chinese have followed a lunar calendar. The different phases of the moon dictated the farmer's plantings and harvests. The symbolism and magic of the moon are honored through poetry, songs, and stories in Chinese culture. Ultimately it is the moon that dictates the timing of this holiday, culminating in the largest Chinese festival of the year, which traditionally lasts for fifteen days of celebrations.

The Chinese New Year and the celebration that surrounds it are unique. It is not a religious holiday but rather, a cultural one full of traditional practices. People travel far and wide to be with their families and friends. The night before the New Year is a popular evening for a reunion dinner, and symbolic foods will be prepared for this meal. For many, this is the most important meal of the year. In hopes of a prosperous year, Taoists and Buddhists will make offerings to the Gods of Heaven, Earth, and Kitchen.

In Chinese households the meal will include a familial cycle of honor. Out of respect,



Lion Dance. Photo by Russ Allen.

children will wear new clothes and serve traditional tea to their elders, who will drink the tea and bless the children with words of wisdom. "Lucky money" will be handed out to children, while deceased ancestors are remembered with love and respect for building the foundations for a successful family.

The color red is symbolic throughout the seasons, and is an especially auspicious color during the New Year's festival. Clothes, decorations, and firecrackers are red in color to symbolically drive evil spirits away. Traditional decorations for the festival include live blooming plants, symbolizing rebirth and growth. Flowers symbolize career success, while plum blossoms symbolize perseverance and bamboo indicates compatibility. Other decorations include oranges and tangerines, which are traditional gifts given when visiting someone's home during the celebration.

The Northwest Chinese Cultural Association (NWCCA) is a non-profit organization. It was formed in 1998 by Bellingham residents with the intention of promoting friendship among individuals and groups who share an interest in Chinese culture. In order to become a member of the organization, allowing you free entrance to celebrations like the upcoming New Year's festival, see the membership application form on their website at: www.nwchineseculturalassociation.org.

This year's annual Chinese New Year celebration will kick off with a traditional lion dance. Members have been invited to wear red to the celebration, and the public is welcome to join in the festivities. A photo booth will be set up for families to commemorate their special holiday celebration. Four restaurants will be preparing food for the event, students will perform classical Chinese music, and a Chinese choir will sing classic folk songs. Children will be given lucky money



The photo corner featuring Doug and Amanda Hostetter (of KGM) with their children. Photo by Dennis Walton.



Violinists Jenelle Kleinhesselink and Max Wang perform at the 2006 Chinese New Year Celebration. Photo by Dennis Walton.

in traditional red envelopes and everyone attending will have a chance to win in a lucky draw. The Association will also make a presentation reflecting on the events organized in 2006.

Regardless of whether or not you wear red, like or dislike tangerines, or if you don't even know your Chinese zodiac sign, this event is designed to be a fun, educational, cultural festival for everyone to experience.

The Chinese New Year Celebration will be held on Sunday, February 11, from noon to 3pm at Fox Hall, next to the Hampton Inn, at 3985 Bennett Drive, Bellingham. Admission is FREE for members. As for guests: Adults, \$15; Children 5-12 years, \$5.00; Children under 5 years, FREE. Annual Membership in the Association is \$25 for families and \$15 for individuals.

For additional information on this and other events, go to the association website: www.nwchineseculturalassociation.org or email nwcca@hotmail.com or call Association President Sabrina Walton at 738-2101.

Laurel Larsen lives in Bellingham, likes to write occasionally, loves to edit, and has an English degree from the University of Washington.

Photos courtesy of the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association.

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