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FAMILY

Adopted kids connect with their culture

Chinese here have embraced local parents

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For parents of adopted Chinese children, Sunday's Chinese New Year celebration was more than just holiday.

The colorful cheongsam dresses and traditional songs and dances were an opportunity to keep their kids connected to their Chinese roots.

More than 300 people packed Fox Hall at the Hampton Inn for the ninth annual event, which ushered in the Year of the Pig with a spirited Lion Dance, a buffet of food and a performance by renowned husband-and-wife musicians Chai Man Cheng and Chuen Ying Cheng.



The event was organized by the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association, which puts on cultural events year-round in Whatcom County.

Bellingham resident Jana Williams and her husband, Clare Fogelson, adopted their daughter Jasmin "Spring" Williams-Fogelson from China when she was 16 months old.

Williams said the family tries to attend as many Chinese cultural events as they can to help their daughter stay in touch with her Chinese roots. Spring, who is now 10, attends Mei Hua Chinese School in Bellingham.

"Heritage is an important part of education," Williams said. "She needs to know who she is."

Williams said the family plans to travel back to China in 2009, which will be the Year of the Ox on the Chinese calendar — just as it was when Spring was born in 1997.

Heidi Hawkins of Bellingham works for Ferndale-based Children's House International Adoptions, which places children from around the globe with parents across America. Hawkins and her husband have adopted three Chinese children of their own: Joi, 12, Suzi, 8, and Mini, 3.

Hawkins said the Chinese population in Whatcom County has embraced local parents of adopted Chinese kids.

"They've been so welcoming to those of us that adopt," Hawkins said.

Americans adopted more than 6,000 Chinese orphans last year, Hawkins said. In response to what it sees as increased demand for its children, the Chinese government has announced that it will tighten regulations on who can adopt — restricting children from going to parents who are unmarried, obese or older than 50.

"China has intermittently been more stringent (in allowing adoption), but they don't always enforce it," Williams said. "So we don't know how it's going to play out."

With Spring in traditional Chinese clothing, the Williams- Fogelsong family posed for a family portrait during Sunday's celebration.

Williams said experiencing the traditions of unfamiliar cultures is positive no matter what your background is. "I'm one of those people that believe that the more people are able to interact with other cultures, the more chance there is for understanding ... and a more peaceful world," Williams said.

"I'd much rather know who my neighbors are and have an understanding of their customs than have my head in the sand."

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