

The Valdosta Daily Times

An Asian Cultural Experience

**Dean Poling
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VALDOSTA -- Cheering students jumped to their feet as the Valdosta Asian Cultural Association's hip-hop team thumped onto the stage presenting a mix of ancient East meets urban West. Yet, this audience of hundreds of Lowndes, Cook and Echols County middle-school students cheered, too, for the performers of more traditional Asian dances. Dances, featuring mostly fellow students, capped a full day of activities for the youngsters who participated in games, played with toys, experienced ceremonies and foods from Asian and Eastern countries such as China, India, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, etc., all presented by local residents who are native to these lands. The community has the opportunity to enjoy these events today as VACA continues its 2005 Azalea Asian Cultural Experience with a public festival at the James H. Rainwater Conference Center.

This growing annual event is the brainchild of Serena Huang, a Valdostan of Asian descent. A few years ago, she wanted to do something to give back to the community while simultaneously sharing her cultural heritage with her children. At first, Huang worked with her children's schools, specifically Hahira Middle School and Dewar Elementary School, teaching traditional dances, songs and developing costumes. The first event featured a dance show of these students' efforts. Soon, additional schools joined the program, and the annual event came to feature dances, exhibits, representatives of additional nations, food, professional Asian performers and more. The Huang family spent thousands of dollars of their money to make the Asian experiences a success. Through these successes, the event has continued growing, moving from one day and evening at Mathis City Auditorium to a two-day event, which includes the school field trip, a Friday night Asian banquet, and today's festival, at the conference center.

Funding has been supplemented through support and grants from the Georgia Humanities Council, Georgia Council for the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Southern Arts Federation.

The 2005 Azalea Asian Cultural Experience continues from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today, James H. Rainwater Conference Center, off Norman Drive. Admission: \$5.

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