

The Valdosta Daily Times

Asian festival proves popular

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VALDOSTA -- McKinley Anderson, 7, studied the chopsticks on a table as part of an exhibit on China Saturday. They were among many items she discovered during the 2005 Azalea Asian Cultural Experience held at the James H. Rainwater Conference Center. The event gave McKinley, a homeschooled student, an opportunity to study the history and culture of other countries without leaving South Georgia. For instance, she learned why the Chinese use chopsticks to eat with as opposed to traditional American tableware -- under the guidance of Confucianism a knife and fork represent a sort of violence.

Cadden Anderson, Mc-Kinley's mother, said the 2005 Azalea Asian Cultural Experience was a first for her family. She said it was an "amazing" educational outing, exposing them all to a world much different from America.

Serena Huang, the event's organizer, estimated more than 1,000 people participated in the Cultural Experience, featuring foods, games, and displays from countries including Japan, Korea, Thailand, India and Taiwan. Compared to the year before, she said, the event has grown tremendously and captured the attention of residents. Huang, a Valdostan of Asian descent, started the the growing annual event as a way of giving back to the community while sharing her heritage. At first, she worked with her children's schools -- Hahira Middle School and Dewar Elementary School -- teaching traditional dances, songs, and developing costumes. Now it's a two-day event, including school field trips, an Asian banquet and a community festival.

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