

The Valdosta Daily Times

Asian Cultural Experience continues

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— VALDOSTA — A pair of lions roamed the aisles of the James H. Rainwater Conference Center's banquet hall Saturday morning. But spectators, rather than shying away from these symbols of good luck, applauded the members of the lion dance team who brought the colorful creatures to life.

So began Day 2 of the Valdosta Asian Cultural Association's Asian Cultural Experience, a free event designed to celebrate Asia's diversity and to teach attendees that people share commonalities the world over. "There's so much of this small globe we just don't know about," said Valdosta Mayor John Fretti during the opening ceremony. "We're getting a glimpse today of Asia because it's here in Valdosta this weekend." R.C. Woo of the Taiwan Economic Center in Atlanta expressed the hope that Valdosta will establish a sister city in his native country.

A banner over the banquet hall stage promised Asian Cultural Experience attendees they would "Travel 10,000 miles through 5,000 years without leaving Valdosta." That trip began with a look at traditional wedding ceremonies from several different countries. Jae Branch, who was born in Korea, and her husband David re-enacted a Korean wedding. "The emphasis is on the ties to the family," said David Branch, who was adorned in a royal blue robe and black head-dress. "It's a unification of the two families — not just the man and woman. Our emphasis is on the nuclear family. The extended family is very important to the Asian culture."

In Korea, the groom arrives at his bride's home and offers her family a gift. The wooden gift the bride's family receives represents the groom's promise of fidelity. Wearing colorful ceremonial costumes, the bride and groom exchange bows to symbolize their commitment to each other and then face each other across a wedding table.

Kenny and Nanami Cunningham brought a Japanese wedding to life with wedding gowns and props funded by the Japan Foundation in New York. Through a video conference, the couple had rehearsed the ceremony for months under the direction of Nanami Cunningham's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Toru Tanaka of Tokyo.

Attendees who walked through the Conference Center could learn about individual countries through rooms set aside for India, Japan, Thailand, etc. Tables set up also offered visitors a taste of delicacies native to some Asian countries. Festivities will continue from 2:30-5:30 p.m. today with the First International Folk Dance Competition.

The Third Annual Asian Cultural Experience is sponsored by the Georgia Humanities Council, National Endowment for the Humanities, Georgia Council for the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, Southern Arts Federation, appropriations from the General Assembly, Valdosta State University, Target, Sam's Club, Georgia Power and UPS.

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