

The Valdosta Daily Times

Our Opinion: Cultural experience returns

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— Valdosta Asian Cultural Association's Asian Cultural Experience returns this weekend with a day-long activity for area middle-school students, a new partnership with the 30th Annual Valdosta State University International Dinner Friday, a community day of activities, events and shows Saturday, and the first year of an international dance contest Sunday.

The Asian Cultural Experience celebrates the diversity of the Asian world which is alive here in many of Valdosta's residents of Asian heritage. Local residents, from various parts of the Asian world, present fashions, customs, and tastes of their respective cultures, sharing both the similarities and differences of their native lands with those of their adopted home of South Georgia.

Having grown into a three-day event at the James H. Rainwater Conference Center, with funding not only from local businesses, state agencies and corporations but the National Endowment of the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Asian Cultural Experience has grown into a premier event in South Georgia.

Much of the credit for that growth, though she would say the credit should be shared with numerous others, goes to Serena Huang. The Asian Cultural Experience grew from Huang's desire to share her native Asian culture and customs with her two children being raised in South Georgia. A few years ago, Huang started with a few dance lessons for her daughter and son's classes at Hahira Middle and Dewar Elementary schools. Huang thought her youngsters may be more accepting of the idea of learning of their parents' culture if they could share it as an educational and fun project with their classmates. Soon, other classes were participating in the program. Then, other schools signed on. And these students' recitals of Chinese-Thai dances slowly became day-long events at Mathis City Auditorium, then more multi-cultural and multi-day events at the conference center.

The Huang family has dedicated thousands of dollars of their own money and countless hours of time and energy into this growing festival, and they are to be commended for their efforts.

The Asian Cultural Experience has become another vital facet of what makes Valdosta-Lowndes County a unique cultural experience within South Georgia.

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