

# **The Valdosta Daily Times**

## **Festival takes on the world**

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— VALDOSTA — The Valdosta Asian Cultural Association's Asian Cultural Experience festival continues growing. This year, it spreads across the world, notes Serena Huang, the festival's founder. "After seven successful years, we are expanding the scope of the project from Asia to Africa and even the entire international community," she says. "We envision a program showcasing the world's rich cultural diversity that enriches the life and education here in South Georgia." To highlight this full international flavor, the event will be called the Azalea International Folk Fair & Dance Competition in 2007, which will "promote lively cultural exchange on the largest scale in Georgia," Huang says.

In the first days of March, organizers will present 10 productions during school field trips (March 1, 2) and a one-day community festival (March 3) at the James H. Rainwater Conference Center. That Saturday, the Second Annual International Folk Dance Competition returns as part of the festivities. This event is open to dancers from throughout the region representing national dances from around the globe. Registration to compete in this event lasts through Jan. 31.

The Web site ([www.GAinternationalfolkfair.org](http://www.GAinternationalfolkfair.org)) has information on how to register as well as 15 posters providing an overview of the festival's productions as well as video demonstrations.

"Among all productions, we are most proud of a new science-education project entitled 'Power Tech — Youth Technology Creativity Contest,'" Huang says. "We hope this new addition will increase our middle-school students' knowledge of and creativity with technology, helping to prepare and motivate them to meet global opportunities in the future high-tech world."

This international festival grew from Serena 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, which has become an event that includes more of the world while gaining attention for Valdosta throughout the world.

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