

# **The Valdosta Daily Times**

## **From Taiwan to Lowndes**

**By Rabyn Ratliff**

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— VALDOSTA — Students of Lowndes Middle and Lowndes High School had an up-close look into international culture Monday as the Taiwanese Youth Folk Sports Troup shared an energetic performance and display of Taiwanese tradition. Lowndes High School's Cultures In Action Club helped to coordinate local performances, along with Serena Huang of the Valdosta Asian Cultural Association. Huang invited the group to the area in a two-day stop on their way to Orlando as they continue a tour of the U.S.

"This is the first time that they've come to our area. This group travels all over the world and we're so lucky among all the big cities to have them here with us," said Huang. Taking to the stage of LHS, the group of 35 students from Keelung Chung Cheng Junior Middle School began the performance in a tribute to their ancestors' journey to the island of Taiwan. Dancers waved sea blue and fire red streamers, as mandolin instruments and strong drums played behind them in the lively music. LHS students were wowed as the Troup shared the next energetic scenes and displayed the skilled Art of Folk Sports — rope skipping, diabolo spinning, top twirling and dance, all choreographed to music.

"We're always trying to broaden the horizons of our students and expose them to cultures around the world, and we saw this as a perfect opportunity to do that," said LHS Principal Wes Taylor. "Our CIA club is very active on campus and we were able to coordinate this visit through them. Our students were in awe of what the Taiwanese students were able to do on stage. It was very impressive."

The Taiwanese Folk Sports Troup will be in Valdosta until Wednesday, and in addition to presenting several performances to local schools and the public, the students will learn about American culture and southern hospitality, while staying with several host families and touring the city. "They're staying with 24 different host families who are showing them around Valdosta," said Huang. "They've gone to Wild Adventures, some of our schools, and to VSU. We really want them to get to know about the university because they'll be graduating in a few years, and if they're interested and like the city, they may come back here for college."

For many of the middle schoolers, this tour marks their first visit to the States. Troup directors hope the visit will prove to be a cultural exchange. "For most of the 35 kids, this is the first time they've visited the United States," said Troup manager Rebecca Chen. "While they're here, they build relationships with their host families and learn about American culture and they feel so happy. We hope that it is a happy experience for both the students of Valdosta and our students."

Many of the LHS students and faculty watched in wonder Monday as the Taiwanese students seemed to do their routines effortlessly. The group drew cheers from the crowd as they tossed their diabolo spinners into the air and across the stage to one another, caught and balanced spinning tops, and skipped through the cycles of three and four turning ropes, all in time with the beat of the music. "We pick this group out of 60 students and we ask that they first get high grades in academics, then practice," said Chen. "They practice about 1-2 hours a day. We hope that through their involvement the tradition of folk arts can continue into the next generation."

The Taiwanese Youth Folk Sports Troup will continue performances today for area schools, and will present a performance for the public this evening in the Lowndes High cafeteria-auditorium, from 6:30- 8:30. p.m.

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Visiting Taiwanese students do a dance during a performance Monday at Lowndes High School.



Students at Lowndes High School watch as a visiting group from Taiwan performs Monday at LHS.



Taiwanese middle-school students perform Monday at Lowndes High School.