

Feb. 10, 2007

CULTURE

Community celebrates lunar new year in Chinese tradition

Renowned B.C. musicians will perform Sunday

JARED PABEN

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM — While a performer in a lion costume dances, others will bang drums, cymbals and gongs. They'll generally cause a racket at Fox Hall on Sunday. And that's the idea.



CHRIS JOSEPH TAYLOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Northwest Chinese Cultural Association President Sabrina Walton gives 4-year-old Jason Zheng a spoonful of her traditional Chinese rice cake dish called Nien Gao as NWCCA committee member Helen Li, left, watches Friday afternoon at Walton's home in Bellingham. Walton had several friends and members of the NWCCA over to prepare for Sunday's Chinese New Year celebration. The celebration is open to the public from 12 to 3 p.m. at Fox Hall next to the Hampton Inn in Bellingham.

JOIN THE CELEBRATION What: The Northwest Chinese Cultural Association's ninth annual Chinese New Year celebration. This is the year of the pig.
When: Noon to 3 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Fox Hall, Hampton Inn, 3985 Bennett Drive, in Bellingham. **Cost:** Free for association members, \$15 for adults, \$5 for children from 5 to 12 years old, free for children younger than 5. **More information:**

www.nwchineseculturalassociation.org

"The noise and the energy is to chase away the bad spirit, and it allows the good spirit to come in then," said Sabrina Walton, president of the Bellingham-based Northwest Chinese Cultural Association.

Members of the area's Chinese- American community are preparing for the group's ninth annual Chinese New Year celebration, which locally will take place Sunday.

The association expects about 200 people to attend this year's celebration, which will include food and entertainment.

The Lion Dance is a highlight for children because it's colorful and energetic, Walton said.

But a performance by two world-famous Chinese performers has humbled event organizers.

Chai Man Cheng will play a flute, while his wife, Chuen Ying Cheng, will play the guzheng, similar to a horizontally placed harp, for the first time in Bellingham, Walton said.

Helen Li, who helped found the association and who studied in China under Chuen Ying, helped land a performance by the Vancouver, B.C.-based couple through her connections.

"This couple is famous in China," Li said Thursday while sipping tea at Food Garden, one of several Bellingham restaurants donating food for the celebration.

The Chinese New Year, which follows a lunar calendar, is actually on Feb. 18, but the association is holding its celebration this Sunday because many local Chinese-Americans spend the holiday with their families in China. But for many here who can't return home, the holiday would be a lonely time without the celebration.

"For us, we don't have family here," Walton said. "Our friends and our community is our family."

For others, the celebration is a chance to experience a new culture or teach their adopted children about their native culture.

About half of association member families are not from China.

Members intend to keep the party casual, so children can connect with the culture and not be intimidated, said Debbie Ruther, association event coordinator and secretary.

At the party, children will each get a traditional red envelope, to drive away evil spirits, with \$1 of "Lucky Money" in it.

Reach Jared Paben at 715- 2289 or jared.paben@bellinghamherald.com.