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CULTURE

Local group focuses on culture

Northwest Chinese Cultural Association boasts 120 locals

**SERENA LEI
THE BELLINGHAM HERALD**

As Helen Li prepared tea under the gazebo in Big Rock Garden Park, the crowd, already huddled together under the small rain shelter, pressed in closer, craning their necks for a better look.

Despite the cold rain, nearly 50 people attended the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association's tea ceremony in April.

The free event, open to the public, is a sign of things to come from the association under the direction of its new president, Sabrina Walton.

"We've grown and we would like to do more cultural events like this," said Walton, who was elected this year. "For the last eight years, our members just got together and did little things, but I think they are ready to do something more public, community events."

CONTACT

For more information about the Northwest Chinese Cultural Association, e-mail nwcca@hotmail.com.

The association started in the mid-1990s as a support group, to foster friendships and a cultural understanding, Walton said.

"There were a lot of families with adopted (Chinese) children, young couples who just got married and came here," Walton said. "It was a support system."

Kay Morris, who adopted a Chinese daughter in 1997, said association members helped her with translation.

The group, which now includes some 120 members in Whatcom County, donates money to Mei Hua Chinese School in Bellingham, the American Red Cross and other charities.

"We'd like to give more to more people," Walton said. "Doing these cultural programs, we thought we could actually make a difference. More people can benefit from it and it's good that we can share this culture."

At the April ceremony, speakers discussed the history of tea in China and the health benefits of tea.

While many in the audience were association members, some came out for the tea.

"I just love tea," said Mark Johnson. "It's interesting to know about the types of tea."

The Bellingham resident drinks four to six cups of tea a day and is trying to phase out coffee.

Walton plans to continue the tea program annually. Next year, she wants to put together an exhibit of teapots, and the year after that, explore tea in other countries.

Other programs throughout the year include a summer picnic in late June and a Mid-Autumn Festival.

Reach Serena Lei at serena.lei@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2264.

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