

Longmont's Chinese New Year celebration catches fire

More than 1,000 expected at event for third year in a row

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Xin Zhang, right, adds a touch of color to a drawing that fifth-grader Julia Lustigson was working on Thursday morning at Eagle Crest Elementary. Zhang was teaching traditional Chinese drawing to students in preparation for the Chinese new year celebration Saturday at Silver Creek High School, where the students' work will be displayed. Zhang, a painter, teaches art at the Confucius Institute at the Community College of Denver. (Lewis Geyer / Staff Photographer)

Five years ago this month, when the Asian-Pacific Association of Longmont first invited the community to celebrate the Chinese New Year, 300 showed up at the Senior Center to watch dancing, receive and give gifts, and taste Chinese food.

This Saturday, organizers expect more than 1,000 participants at the now-annual event, which has grown so popular that it is held at the Silver Creek High School gymnasium.

If you go

What: Chinese New Year celebration

When: 2-5 p.m. Saturday

Where: Silver Creek High School, 4901 Nelson Road, Longmont

Cost: Free

More info: Call 720-494-3721 for more information.

The Chinese New Year started Feb. 8 this year, but since the celebration runs for 15 days, Saturday's celebration isn't late. The Year of the Fire Monkey will be ushered in with the traditional lion dance, taiko drumming and kung-fu among the highlights.

Organizer Rita Liu, founder of A-PAL, said that the event is just one part of the work that she's been doing to promote multiculturalism in the region by coaxing other Asian people out of their own groups to serve the community and develop mutual respect.

But it is a big part.

Liu said the in the event's second year, at Silver Creek, 600 people came. "The auditorium wasn't big enough, so we decorated the gym," she said. "The third year, we got 900 people.

"Both the school and the city thought it was a very meaningful event for promoting multiculturalism because we bring all of the different nationalities in to learn about each other."

The past two years have seen more than 1,000 people attend the event, and this year, organizers have been working for six months to prepare. On Thursday, Liu was at Eagle Crest Elementary School to oversee a class of children learning about traditional Chinese art.

"At the event on Saturday, we not only have the performance, the activity booth and the food, we also have two art shows," Liu said. "One is a traditional Chinese art show, and then also a children's art show."

Liu said that this year's event will include five lions in the lion dance, kung-fu, Japanese taiko drumming and a Chinese fashion show. There's a children's dance and a violin performance, she said.

"Then everybody goes to the hall for an educational tour, where children or adults can learn about brush painting, the calligraphy, and even the abacus. We have food sampling too. It's a lot of work."

Liu said that between 3 and 4 percent of Longmont's population is Asian, though people travel from neighboring cities for the event.

Carrie Adams, Silver Creek Leadership Academy program coordinator, said that this is a great family event to celebrate Asian cultures, and that about 100 Silver Creek students volunteer to help with setup, cleanup and much more.

"We also have Mandarin Chinese classes at our school," Adams said. "This is an opportunity for them to put that into use and speak with some of the people that are here doing the booths that speak Chinese."

According to Adams, approximately 2 percent of the school's students are Asian, many of them adopted by white American families, so this event provides those children with an opportunity to be exposed to their heritage.

"This offers a great opportunity to say, 'This is my school, and my school really supports my culture'," Adams said.

Saturday's event is free and open to the public, with the organizers keen to stress that everybody is welcome.

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Yellow is added to a traditional Chinese drawing Thursday morning at Eagle Crest Elementary (Lewis Geyer / Staff Photographer)