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We have been an integral part of the community and we are proud to be an integral part of this community

*Diane Tang-Liu*

## Chinese culture center plans unveiled

**By Peggy Goetz**

The Irvine World News

A dream is coming to fruition in Northwood. The South Coast Chinese Cultural Association announced plans to break ground in late fall on its Chinese Cultural Center.



Artist's rendering of the South Coast Chinese Cultural Center education building, the first building scheduled at the Northwood site.

The proposed \$12-million project will sit on a 3.9-acre site at Truman and Roosevelt, next to the shopping center with Albertsons and Kohl's.

Construction is expected to take about a year. The first phase of the cultural center will be the education building. The attached gymnasium will be the second phase and the third phase will be a performing arts center, according to a presentation made Tuesday by the group's president, Diane Tang-Liu.

Having the education center and its planned program established and financially stable is the group's first priority, she said. The weekend Irvine Chinese School that now meets at University High School will move to the new facility and an after-school weekday program is planned as well.

That will mean raising enough money for the building as well as having a reserve of funds to run the program.

The cost of the education building and the gym is expected to be about \$8 million. Tang-Liu said the group has already

raised about \$6.2 million. If the full amount can be raised in the coming months the gym can be built at the same time as the education building.

The performing arts center is expected to cost about \$4 million. No construction date has been set for that part of the center. The land, purchased last fall from the Irvine Co., cost about \$4 million.

The Cultural Center project is supported so far by donations from about 400 individuals, businesses and organizations.

The South Coast Chinese Cultural Association has about 1,000 members and was founded in Irvine in 1976. Most of its "work-force" is volunteers, with about 20,000 volunteer hours logged annually, according to Tang-Liu.

The group's major focus has been the volunteer-based Irvine Chinese School meeting Sundays at University High School. The school has as many as 1,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade students taking classes in Chinese language and culture.

The school is not limited to people of Chinese background, emphasized Tang-Liu. There are students of Korean, Japanese, Malaysian, Vietnamese and European heritage and anyone is welcome. In addition to the classes, students participate in many statewide and national competitions and events.

The Cultural Association has a history of working with Irvine school district. Tang-Liu said that from 1983 through 1996 the foundation funded and administered Chinese language classes at University High School. The school district added Chinese to its regular curriculum at University High in 1996.

Students who attend the weekend language classes can also earn high school language credits. A member of the Cultural Association board works with the Irvine Public Schools Foundation and the group supports local schools. Good schools are among the things that have attracted a large Chinese community to Irvine, said Tang-Liu.

Community classes in Chinese language for adults are also offered by the Cultural Foundation.

The group takes entertainers and cultural activities to schools and community events and sponsors forums for Irvine elections.

"We have been an integral part of the community and we are proud to be an integral part of this community," said Tang-Liu.

The group began making plans and raising funds for its new center in the fall of 2001. The purchase of the land in Northwood closed in November 2002. Karen Kuo-Limb, the foundation's director of design and construction, said the group was particularly lucky to have the Irvine Co.'s backing for obtaining a site in a prime location. The proposed project's conditional use permit was approved by the city Planning Commission last month.

The two-story, 33,223-square-foot education building will have a 300-seat auditorium, 20 classrooms, a terraced courtyard for outdoor events, and a Chinese-style garden.

The attached gym will make an additional 11,075 square feet of space. The gym will hold a full basketball court, or can be used for three volleyball courts or seven badminton courts. There will also be a folding performance stage and room for seating for about 700.

The proposed 12,597-square-foot performing arts center will have about 540 seats, according to Kuo-Limb.


Tang-Liu said that center will be open to use by the whole community, and Mayor Larry Agran lauded that aspect of the project as he spoke at the Tuesday presentation.

"The concept here that attracts me," said Agran, "is that its doors will be open to the entire community to come in and participate."

The Chinese community in Irvine was at about 15,000 people as of the 2000 Census data, and was the largest segment of the city's Asian population. At that time the Asian population of Irvine was just under 30 percent of the total population, and that has grown about 1 percent per year, said Agran.

Irvine's population of people with Asian heritage is the highest percentage for any Southern California city with more than 100,000 population, said the mayor.

The mayor pointed out that 2000 Census data supports the claim that Irvine is a place where diversity is balanced. It is diverse but integrated across the city's residential communities.



Agran said the integrated diversity is in part due to the fact that Irvine is a relatively new city and civil rights and anti-discrimination laws have been in effect during its development.

"For me this is a dream come true. We really are a global village here," said Agran.

Information about the South Coast Chinese Cultural Association is available by calling Lisa Kuan at (949) 770-1567.

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