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Fifth annual AsiaFest celebrates cultural diversity



FIFTH ANNUAL ASIAFEST. Portland Taiko (above) and Natarpana Dance Company (below) performed as part of the fifth annual AsiaFest, in celebration of Asian Heritage Month. The officially sanctioned Rose Festival event featured music, dance, cultural performances, a trivia challenge, a kids' area, arts-and-crafts and information booths, Asian cuisine, bubble tea and Hawaiian shaved ice, and more. (AR Photos/Jan Landis and Ali Lim)

By Maileen Hamto
The Asian Reporter

From a multicultural break dance showcase to a performance by the Portland Chinese Yo-Yo Team and an Okinawan martial-arts exhibition by the Westside Martial Arts Academy, the fifth annual AsiaFest impressed audiences with the variety and diversity of cultures among the Asian and Pacific Islander diaspora.

Held at the Oregon Convention Center, AsiaFest featured a daylong lineup of traditional music and dance from Japan, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Hawai'i, Cambodia, India, and elsewhere. Exhibitors included a number of local Asian community groups such as the Asian Health & Service Center, the Oregon Buddhist Temple, the Oregon Falun Dafa Association, and China Passion Cultural Services. Businesses and civic groups eager to reach out to the Asian community were represented. The food court featured a tasty selection of authentic Asian and Pacific Islander cuisine. Festival-goers were also able to experience bubble tea and Hawaiian shaved ice.

Pan-Asian performances showcased the rich diversity of cultures, religions, and traditions of countries in Asia. The Maharlika Dance Troupe performed



several dances that reflect the strong influence of Spanish colonization on the Philippine archipelago. Natarpana Dance Company displayed the grace and elegance of Bharatnatyam, one of the most celebrated forms of dance in Southern India. Dancers from Kaleinani o ke Kukui, representing Hawai'i, transported the

audience to an island home as they performed a number of hula and Tahitian dances.

The Foot Soldiers Break Dance Troupe brought the house down with funky beats and eclectic b-boy styles. Portland Taiko was the headliner of the event, bringing the dynamic energy of the Big Drum to the AsiaFest stage. Co-artistic director Michelle Fujii and a number of veteran Portland Taiko drummers were on hand to wow the crowd.

AsiaFest is celebrated in Portland during Asian Heritage Month in May. Families with young children are a main draw to the event every year. Now a tradition at AsiaFest, the trivia challenge had children (and adults) visiting booths in the exhibitors' area to find answers to questions about the size of Thailand, the names of Japan's four main islands, and more. Once questionnaires were completed, participants spun the prize wheel to claim their reward.

Volunteer Asmita Jain, a graduate student at Portland State University, spent the afternoon helping out at the Kids' Fun Center, which featured arts and crafts and face painting. A first-time volunteer, Jain worked with the children on a dragon-coloring activity. "As Asians, we tend to know about our cultures. Typi-

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Jewish family builds mosque for Muslims

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Hello Kitty named tourism ambassador

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Yaku: Haikus about Yaks in Tibet

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AALDEF hosts voting rights trainings

The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), a 34-year-old national civil-rights organization, will provide a series of free legal trainings in multiple cities to assist Asian-American community-based organizations preparing for summer voter registration drives and presidential elections in the fall.

In particular, the trainings will review current voter identification laws in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in *Crawford v. Marion County Election Board* and *Indiana Democratic Party v. Rokita*, which upheld an Indiana law requiring voters to show government-issued photo identification before they could vote.

Attorneys will provide legal information under local, state, and federal laws about legal responsibilities in conducting voter registration; voters' rights on Election Day regarding interpreters, provisional ballots, identification require-

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Sakurakai receives Consul General's award

The Consul General of Japan in Portland recently honored Sakurakai, a Japanese language and culture school for children of Japanese descent, with the Consul General's Award for its many years of community involvement and service in promoting Japanese-language education, thereby strengthening cultural awareness and amity between Japan and the United States.

Sakurakai was established in Tigard in 1995 with the goal of providing Japanese language and cultural education to children of Japanese residents

in Oregon. As of this year there are nearly 4,000 Japanese permanent residents in the state, a number that has grown by more than 50 percent in the past 10 years.

Sakurakai prepares its students to actively engage in American society while preserving ties to Japan. It hopes the cultural fluency obtained helps expand and enrich the understanding of Japanese culture in the United States.

The award was presented to Sakurakai by Mr.

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ASIAN FUSION. The AsiaFest 2008 entertainment stage featured many performers, including (clockwise from top left) the Westside Dance & Gymnastics Academy, the Portland Art & Cultural Center Dance Team, Tomodachi-Kai, the Foot Soldiers Break Dance Group, and the Portland Chinese School Yo-Yo Team. The Kids' Area was a popular destination for people of all ages. The area featured face, hand, and arm painting, art & craft activities, the trivia challenge prize wheel, and more. Vendor booths, including China Passion Cultural Services, kept attendees busy throughout the day. (AR Photos/Jan Landis, Ali Lim, Victor Patavanich, Maileen Hamto, George Wu, Travis Omlid, and Eugene Wong)

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cally, non-Asians don't have a familiarity with how diverse Asian cultures really are. This is really a good way for the community to learn about different Asian cultures," said Jain.

This year's AsiaFest drew exhibitors and participants from across the region. Shannon Matthews with Spirit Mountain Casino played dealer at the blackjack table, a first for AsiaFest. Although cards were dealt, no real gambling occurred. "The dealer kept pulling a card from the deck until I beat him," said one attendee, who won a gift certificate good for a free night stay at the Spirit Mountain Casino Resort.

"I appreciate being able to see many different groups in the Asian community represented in this event," said Richard Plummer, who hails from Lincoln City. He and his wife Carolyn manned the Lincoln City Visitors' Association booth, which offered information about entertainment options along the Oregon Coast.

The event was sponsored by *The Asian Reporter*, the City of Portland, Spirit Mountain Casino, the *Portland Chinese Times*, State Farm Insurance, and TriMet. An estimated 2,500 people visited this year's AsiaFest, a Portland Rose Festival-sanctioned event. Many attendees

experienced the event for the first time.

"The kids really enjoyed spinning the prize wheel. They won toys," said Lori Saephanh of Aloha, who attended AsiaFest with her family, which included five nieces and nephews that range in age from six months to 13 years old. Lori said she read about AsiaFest in *The Asian Reporter* and decided to bring the family for a day's worth of entertainment.

"We're definitely coming back again next year."

To learn more about AsiaFest and The Asian Reporter Foundation, visit <www.ARFoundation.net>.

