



Student Rebecca Lam of Ridgefield concentrates while trying to say, "You are the teacher, Mrs. Chen," in Mandarin.

Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Chinese Lessons

Most adults in Clark College class have relatives who share the language

By **DAVE KERN**
Columbian staff writer

Concentration was etched on Rebecca Lam's face as she worked to say, "You are the teacher, Mrs. Chen," in Mandarin.

But she got it and won a, "Hey, good job," from Nancy Chen.

Lam is one of nine students in Chinese Adult Conversation class held on Sunday afternoons at Clark College. It is held in conjunction with the American West Vancouver Chinese School, which has 85 preschoolers through fifth-graders who also study Mandarin on Sundays.

Lam is in the class because her husband, Daniel Lam, is part Chinese and her three children are enrolled in phonics classes at the Chinese school. "I really want to learn along with them so I can support them in their schooling," Rebecca said. Her boy, Karl, is 8, and her twin

girls, Ingrid and Elsie, are 5.

So how is it going, learning Mandarin?

"I am loving it," Rebecca said after her second lesson Sunday. "I am so excited. We've got movies and my kids took a summer class in Chinese in Portland at the International School."

Laughter and learning

At Sunday's class, teacher Chen worked with students on easy phrases. There was much laughter along with the learning.

"She's really comfortable to work with because she doesn't pressure you," Rebecca said of Chen. "I love her. Her whole demeanor, she's so accepting, encouraging and she even talks about when she was learning English and that makes you feel more comfortable when you

stumble."

"I try to teach them from the very beginning of the conversation," Chen said. First phrases include "I am sorry," "Good morning," and "How are you?" The class will continue until June.

"It's fun because they have a strong motivation to learn," said Chen, 50, who came to the U.S. from Taiwan in 2001. She is married to dentist Frank Lin and has two boys, Jimmy, 21, a student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and Danny, 16, a student at Union High School.

Lily Chen, 16, no relation to Nancy, serves as class assistant. Lily, of Camas, left Taiwan in the third grade.

Most class members either have a Chinese spouse or a child in the



Nancy Chen leads a class in Mandarin at Clark College on Sunday. Chen came to the U.S. from Taiwan in 2001.

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Student Ruth Fung said she has been married for nine years to Albert Fung, who is of Chinese descent. Their son, Austin, 6, is in the phonics class.

"We want to carry on the Chinese tradition with our son," she said. "We go to Hong Kong about every two years to visit relatives and I have four sister-in-laws. I want to know what they're saying," she said, laughing.

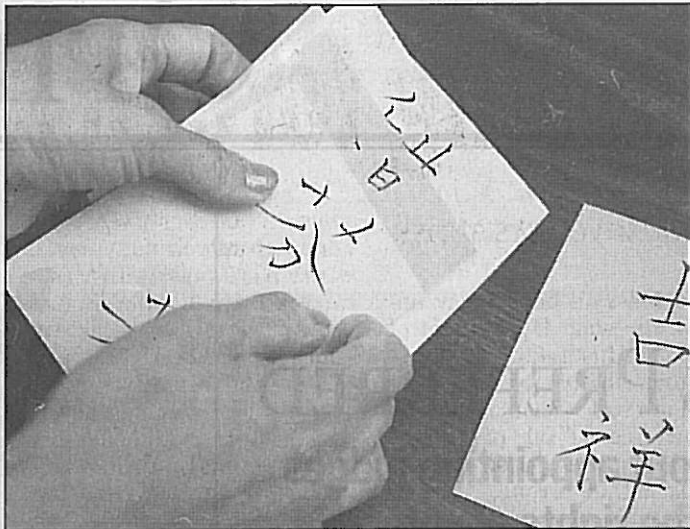
Tracy Woods of Camas and Carrie Duffey of Washougal have a common reason for being in the class. Their families adopted a child from China.

"We look forward to taking (Grace, 4) back to China and we just want her to be able to communicate with people in China," Duffey said. "One in five people on the planet speak Chinese."

"I'd like to be able to sing a lullaby in Mandarin," said Woods. Her daughter, Anna, is 6 and she and husband James will travel to Taiwan late this year to adopt another baby girl.

And why not help your child be fluent in Chinese, Woods said. "It's going to help in any career. And I do think it shows huge respect for the culture."

And teacher Chen said she is happy to help the students, because "conversation is the first step."



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Nancy Chen picks up Mandarin flash cards after teaching a class at Clark College on Sunday.

Youngsters, adults can learn Mandarin

Immersion class

The Vancouver School District this fall started a Chinese immersion program at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in west Vancouver. The kindergarten class, taught by Hsin-Yi Hu, has 24 students. The all-day immersion program is scheduled to grow every year by a grade level, to eventually include high school.

The program follows a "90/10" model, meaning that 90 percent of instruction is in Chinese and 10 percent in English. Around third grade, instruction in English and Chinese are equally divided.

Howard Yank, curriculum resource coordinator for the school district, said in January there will be meet-

ings to explain the program to parents who will have kindergartners in 2010. Those meetings will be announced on the district's Web site, www.vansd.org.

Chinese school

Students in the American West Vancouver Chinese School meet from 1:30 to 4:20 on Sundays in Clark College's Hanna Hall. There are two language classes, one class in culture and also craft, calligraphy and Chinese yo-yo classes.

Principal George Kanchanavaleerat, a volunteer, works as an application engineer for Nike. The tuition is \$250 a semester, and the Web site is www.awvchineseschool.us.