



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Lion dancers take the stage during the Tet festival held by Clark County's Vietnamese community Saturday at Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary School. Below: Ha Quang Tieu, president of the Vietnamese Community of Clark County, prepares to welcome the Year of the Tiger.

THE TIGER'S READY TO ROAR



Vietnamese community sees opportunity, plans for success in new year

By TOM VOGT
Columbian staff writer

A celebration of heritage and culture rocked the house Saturday as the local Vietnamese community welcomed the lunar new year. Asian dancers in fluffy lion costumes, accompanied by a drummer and a cymbals player, delighted the audience during the Tet festival at Vancouver's Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary School.

But the annual event also included a look ahead to the Year of the Tiger and far beyond.

It was a chance to bring a younger generation into leadership roles, and to make connections with partners in the wider community, said one of the organizers.

For this 2010 event, "Youth have been more involved," said Han Tran.

The 2003 graduate of Fort Vancouver High School returned home in June after receiving a master's degree in social work at the University of Washington.

"In the next year, we want to go in a different direction — not just focus on culture, not just once or twice a year," Tran said. "We want to introduce services and resources into the Vietnamese community. The momentum is there."

Some of those resources and prospective partners were part of the event, including Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt.

Leavitt described the festival as a way for members of Clark County's



A crowd gathers for the festival. Besides celebrating culture, organizers used the occasion for outreach, "to introduce services and resources into the Vietnamese community," said Han Tran, one of the organizers.

Vietnamese community to "preserve their heritage and promote participation."

There was a chance to explore higher-ed opportunities at tables staffed by emissaries from Clark College and Washington State University Vancouver.

Student Thien Tran was one of the Clark College representatives. A native of Vietnam, the 22-year-old Tran (no relation to Han Tran) has completed his pharmacy-tech studies and now is in Clark's two-year pre-medicine program.

In addition to helping Tran progress toward a career in health care, "They helped me with my English skills," he said.

The Clark County Vietnamese community numbers around 3,000. The number is as fuzzy as one of

those lions' faces though, and that's why the U.S. Census Bureau also had a desk at the event.

"We want to educate this population about the importance of Census 2010," said Ken Andrews. He's a member of Leadership Clark County's Class of 2010, which is assisting the local census effort.

"We're trying to reach undercounted populations, and one of them is the Vietnamese community," Andrews said.

And the Vietnamese community agrees. A local nonprofit group, the Vietnamese Community of Clark County, notes on its Web site (<http://www.vnccc.org>) that the 2008 American Community Survey estimated a population of 3,010. "However, through community gatherings and house visits, Viet-

namese community leaders suggest a higher number."

Accurate numbers are important, because population numbers help determine funding for some programs.

One person counted "can mean \$1,000 in revenue a year for 10 years," Andrews said.

While the Tet festival was an opportunity to build some new relationships, it also was a chance to renew some old friendships.

Former mayor Royce Pollard got to chat again with an old comrade, Thoi Duong. The former South Vietnamese army officer was attached to Pollard's unit for two years as a scout during the Vietnam War.

"I came here in 1981 after seven years in a POW camp," Duong said.

He didn't know Pollard lived here until about 15 years ago, Duong said: "I saw him on Memorial Day."

Duong caught the eye of Pollard, who said he realized, "I think I know that guy!"

Duong told the mayor, "I'm your 'Kit Carson' scout."

"Talk about emotional," Pollard said. "He saved my ass a couple of times."

Did you know?

■ There are a few days left in the Year of the Ox, before the lunar new year officially occurs in Vietnam on Feb. 14.

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