



PIGEON POST

Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society holds screening



The Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society, with assistance from the Taipei City Government Department of Cultural Affairs, will hold a commemoration to mark the 63rd anniversary of VJ Day — the day the Japanese surrendered to end World War II. Aug. 15 is also celebrated as FEPOW (Far East Prisoner of War) day in many places

around the world. This is a day that remembers all prisoners of war — military and civilian — captured by the Japanese during World War II.

The event will take place on Sunday at the Taipei Film House, No. 18 Zhongshan N Road, Sec. 2. The program will feature a memorial tribute to FEPOWs, followed by a showing of the film *War Story*, which depicts the life of Canadian doctor Major Benjamin Wheeler and other prisoners of war at the Kinkaseki POW camp from 1942 to 1945 (the film is in English with no Chinese subtitles).

A collection of Taiwan POW and military artifacts will also be on display. Doors open at 12:30pm to give guests a chance to view the exhibit before the film commences. A question-and-answer session will follow the screening.

AIT staff give a little extra to Taipei



American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) staff organized the institute's first-ever employee-initiated blood drive on Thursday.

A Taipei Blood Center bus was stationed outside the AIT compound from 9:30am to 4:30pm and collected blood from about 60 volunteers.

"As a member of the community here in Taiwan, we are happy to sponsor this blood drive to help those who are in need of blood transfusions," AIT Director Stephen Young said. "We also hope to encourage more people to become blood donors."

Taipei's blood inventory tends to drop during the summer and the city is critically low on type O and type A blood, the Taipei Blood Center said.

Information on where one can donate blood is available on the Taipei Blood Center Web site at www.tp.blood.org.tw. The center's Donor Recruitment Department can also be reached at 2897-1600 ext. 6112 to 6117.

French national to receive award

A French national teaching at a college in Kaohsiung is to receive the Chevalier dans l'Ordre National du Merite, one of the highest honors issued by the French government, for her work in helping French people in Taiwan over the last 10 years.

Agnes Roussel-Shih, a professor at Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, said she was surprised when she was recently informed of the honor.

"I simply did what I was supposed to do. Some people out there must have done a better job than I," she said on July 24.

She will be one of just 38 French nationals around the world and the only French national in Taiwan to receive the honor this year.

Roussel-Shih, who is the college's second teacher to be awarded the medal, serves as a volunteer worker for the French government in southern Taiwan.

The 39-year-old came to Taiwan in 1992 with her Taiwanese husband.

The French government also presents medals to promote cooperation between Taiwan and France in such fields as education, economics, culture, law, immigration and agriculture.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA



PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

Why does the MRT in Taipei stop running soon after midnight, yet maintain a 24-hour call center?

A. Hadzima

A-hok says:

The Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation (TRTC) tells me that although the MRT's last services depart at around midnight, the hotline stays open to answer queries on schedules, routes or lost property. And just in case you're curious, the MRT doesn't entirely shut down: trains run to and from the depots and maintenance centers and other work continues throughout the night. Hotline operators speak basic English and Japanese, so residents from overseas and tourists are also welcome to give them a call at 02-2181-2345. Passengers can also call the Taipei City Government at the number 1999 any time to make inquiries about the MRT — or anything else to do with the government in Taipei, for that matter.



If you have something you'd like to ask, please write to community@LETTERtaipeitimes.com.

Remove "LETTER" from the e-mail address before clicking on Send.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Recently the Taipei Times was informed of confusion between the weekly *Community Compass* page and *Compass* magazine, a publication in Taichung City. The Taipei Times wishes to state there is no connection between *Community Compass* and the Taichung publication, nor should any be inferred.



DO-RE-MI FOR DORIS

Local Christian group members hold a "thank you" concert for Doris Brougham, center, on Saturday in Taipei. Brougham, who came to Taiwan in 1951 as a missionary, is now best known for teaching English through her radio show and magazine "Studio Classroom." PHOTO: CHEN JUNG-FONG, TAIPEI TIMES

The Center helps expats make themselves at home

GETTING CONNECTED: Classes, counseling and community are just a few of the many services available at the center in Shilin

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

"A home away from home" is the feeling that the Community Services Center wants its patrons to feel when they visit the cozy two-story space nestled in the quiet residential area of Shilin (士林) in Taipei City.

About a 10 to 15 minute walk from the Zhishan and Mingde MRT stations, the center has become a must-go place for many expats wanting useful information, ranging from where to go for Indian food, where to find mental health counseling services to newcomer orientations.

Steve Parker, an Australian who was recently installed as the center's director, stressed that it is open to everyone and is not merely an esoteric club exclusively for the expat community.

"The counseling aspect is really the core of the services that our center offers," he said.

All eight counselors were trained in the West and have at minimum master's degrees and five years of clinical experience. Moreover, all the counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to crisis situations. The languages spoken among them include English, Mandarin, Hoklo and Filipino.

One of the counselors, Perry Malcolm, said he has seen all sorts of issues come through the center in the last eight years.

"We deal with a host of issues, including adjustment problems, mood swings, depression, anxiety, children's learning difficulties, marital and relationship issues and sometimes even alcoholism," he said, adding counselors also provide crisis intervention services for those with suicidal thoughts.

Echoing Parker, Malcolm said the counseling service is the *raison d'être* for the center and all the other aspects, such as survival Chinese language training, are augmentations of it.

"All the other services are here to hopefully keep people out of counseling, because when people learn to speak the language or establish connections with other people, they have an easier time getting used to their new environment," Malcolm said.

All counseling fees are set on a sliding scale, depending on each person's income and ability to pay.

One of the most popular activities the center offers is the Wednesday Coffee Morning, where anyone is welcome to sit on the big plush couch and chat with friends old and new as they nibble on snacks and sip coffee, he said.

"When people feel connected, it is easier for them get used to their new surroundings," Malcolm said.

Another key in getting over transition blues, he said, is not to give oneself undue stress and learn to let go of preconceptions.

The center also hosts a workplace workshop to teach people how to deal with diversity in their working life, such as how to work with Western professionals and, for Western managers, how to better understand their Taiwanese colleagues, Parker said.

Visitors can also sign up for events and classes, such as Mexican cooking, yoga, Pilates, flower arranging, scrapbook keeping and even computer skills that are taught by people from within the community.

An insider's view of the Center

Former director of the Community Services Center Mary Chua shared her thoughts about the center and expectations for its new director in an e-mail interview with *Taipei Times*' staff reporter David Chen.

Taipei Times: How has the role of the center in the community changed during your time there?

Mary Chua: The mission of the Community Services Center has always been to provide support services to the international community in Taipei. With that in mind, the role of the center did not change under my leadership. Keeping to the center's mission, I focused on our core service, counseling, to ensure that we had a strong team to respond to the needs of the community. The number of counselors on the team increased from two to seven, and the number of counseling sessions provided from 1,200 to over 2,500 annually.

In addition, to support information services to the community, the center also increased the range of publications to include not only our magazine, *Centered on Taipei*, and book, *Taipei Living*, but also a series of hiking guides by Richard Saunders, a city map including the northern suburbs, and taxi cards. I was very gratified to see over time that those who visited the center and used its services represented a more diverse range of community members, people from all over the world, of all ages and from all economic sectors.

TT: What accomplishments are you most proud of with the center?

Chua: During my tenure as director, I witnessed once again a diverse group of very talented and dedicated people come together to support and revitalize the center: volunteers, donors, consultants, contributing writers and photographers, and staff.

These stakeholders, working together toward a common purpose, made the entire organization stronger. Financially, the center is healthier and is in a better position to weather external emergencies that would adversely affect revenue from programs or advertising.

Center premises, while still modest, have been improved to look more welcoming and organized. We updated the center logo and tagline to provide a more contemporary, welcoming and dynamic image. New ideas for classes, programs and publications were embraced and many of these initiatives have had staying power.

Her programs can be more aggressively marketed. The Center Web site can be further improved. Services for teens can be reconsidered. The potential impact of direct flights and other circumstances on community demographics can be discussed for ways the center can best respond.

TT: What are some personal qualities that Steve Parker, the new director, will bring to the job?

Chua: Steve is insightful, articulate and a good listener. I understand from those who know him well that he has a very good sense of humor. Each of these qualities will serve him well.

Additional events have raised awareness about the center, as well as improved the organization's financial health. Among them, the ECCT ICRT International Charity Golf Cup figures most prominently. Several sections to the center Web site were added to provide more information to the community: disaster preparedness, considering a move to Taipei, lists of charities, mental health resources and our magazine, *Centered on Taipei*. I am most proud that these efforts were collective and cooperative.

TT: How do you see the center developing in the future?

Chua: An organization like the center is in a perpetual state of making available its unrealized potential. How it develops depends on the resources of time, talent and funding, the vision of key stakeholders and the will of the community that the organization relies on and serves. Given the highly transient nature of the community, these conditions are ever changing.

In my view, the calibration of a general plan is more appropriate than implementing a detailed strategic five-year plan. With that as a backdrop, I think that the center's welcome services and counseling program must continuously improve. Amy Liu, the center's newcomer orientation and cross-cultural trainer, has developed new programs for local professionals working for multinationals and these workshops have been very well received. She has also started training for those who plan to repatriate to their home country.

See www.community.com.tw for more information. The monthly magazine *Centered on Taipei* is in major bookstores along with the center's other publications, including a Taipei living guide and an easy at-a-glance map of the capital.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES CENTER

Filipinos revel in hidden poetic flair at monthly literary get-togethers

PUTTING IT IN WORDS: An informal association of Filipino poets and writers in Taipei provides an outlet for migrant workers to demonstrate and develop literary talents and maintain their dignity

BY EMMANUELLE TZENG
CNA, TAIPEI

*"To inspire the uninspired
is his noble desire,
Lead them to their paths
and light their fire,
It is his words so mighty and bold,
That will somehow bring joy and
peace to the lonely world."*

Conventional wisdom stereotypes foreign laborers in Taiwan as uneducated and working in so-called "3D" industries — dirty, dangerous and difficult. But in truth, many of them are gifted and articulate.

The poem above titled *The Poet Behind My Shadow*, written by Melvin Laureano, a young Filipino worker who toils in a Taipei County factory, is just one example of the talent and literary potency of some of Taiwan's Filipino migrants.

During a recent interview, they spoke not of their wages, treatment or subpar living conditions, but rather of their passion for poetry and their pride in being Filipinos.

Taiwan began allowing local companies to hire foreign laborers in 1989. Council of Labor Affairs statistics show there were 86,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan as of February, with 70.3 percent working in manufacturing jobs and the remainder employed as caregivers.

To express their nostalgia, joys and sorrows in the exhausting and monotonous environments in which they work, some Filipinos have taken to writing poetry.

In doing so, they say, they have rediscovered their pride and dignity, fostered an environment celebrating the Philippines' cultural heritage and found a release for their souls.

The Samahang Makata International-Taiwan Chapter (SMI), an informal association of Filipino poets and writers, was created in 1999 by Jun Sanchez, a Filipino working in Taiwan.

After Mass on every third Sunday of the month, members gather in a park near St Christopher's Church on Zhongshan N Road in Taipei, where the largely Catholic Filipino community gathers after a week's work.

During their regular meeting, they discuss the organization's annual program and activities and recite poems they have composed in English or Tagalog, the most widely spoken language in the Philippines.

Their poems are regularly published in journals such as *The Migrants* and *The Filipino Post*, said Maria Cristina Artigue, who became SMI president on July 20.

One of the most important activities is called *Balagtasan*, a traditional literary form in the Philippines that is performed on special occasions like Independence Day.

"In a *Balagtasan*, which means a poetic debate, two poets engage each other for about 20 minutes on a designated topic, in poetic form," said Laureano, SMI's project manager.

Sometimes such debates are also broadcast on Radio Station Pinoy, which broadcasts programs in Tagalog on Sundays.

"Many of our members do not have days off, they can only participate by listening to the radio," Laureano said. "We want to not only entertain every Filipino, but to give them some viewpoints, ideas."

Many of the foreign laborers from the Philippines are highly educated, but chose — not always willingly — to work in Taiwan to earn a better living.

"As the economy in the Philippines is in crisis, I came to Taiwan to be a domestic helper, but it's a pity, because I have talent," said Artigue, who holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

After joining the SMI last year, she finally had an outlet to demonstrate and develop her literary knowledge and talent and to maintain her dignity.

She came to work in Taiwan as a caregiver four years ago, leaving behind her eight-year-old son. The suffering caused by separation, her love for her son and her struggles in Taiwan became the primary inspirations for her creations.

Laureano found the group to be the ideal way to spend idle time.

"Before, I used to spend my weekends in the dormitory, which is a total waste. But when I joined the SMI and saw my poems published, I realized that my hidden talents were revealed and developed," said Laureano, a previous winner of the best poem award in the organization's annual competition.

"After I joined the SMI, my heavy workload and bad dormitory facilities became more bearable," said another member of the organization, whose dormitory is not equipped with air-conditioning.

