



PIGEON POST

Taipei County offers new multilingual service



A multiple-service counter to help new immigrants was launched by the Taipei County Government last Tuesday. The counter, located on the first floor of the Taipei County Government building, will provide translation, legal counseling and referral services in six languages — Mandarin, English, Vietnamese, Burmese, Indonesian and Thai. The Pearl S. Buck Foundation was commissioned by the county government to manage the counter. Mo Kai-fang, an Indonesian woman married to a Taiwanese, spoke at the launching ceremony, recounting her experience when she came to Taiwan. "I love Taiwan, but when I first arrived I had difficulty with the language, which caused communication problems whenever I had to go to government offices," she said. Mo played herself in a TV drama depicting her story and won the coveted Golden Bell Award. A staffer from Vietnam said that she was happy to have the opportunity to serve her people, saying that new immigrants will now be able to avoid having to use gestures when trying to communicate with government agencies.



PHOTO: CNA

Friends of Obama hold dinner



Supporters of Senator Barack Obama are welcome to attend a fundraising dinner in Taipei on Sept. 27, a group called Friends of Obama in Taiwan says. All may bring their family or friends to El Gallo at No. 42, Zhongshan N Road, Sec. 7 in Tianmu for dinner from 7pm to 9pm to hear from the Obama campaign and celebrate the upcoming election. The giving levels vary from underwriter at NT\$25,000 per couple to individual tickets at NT\$2,500 per person.

For more information, contact Amy Cooper at acooper@pstrategies.com.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA



IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR EVENTS, INTERVIEWS OR TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE COVERED ON THIS PAGE PLEASE SEND YOUR IDEAS TO: community@taipeitimes.com

Janet Hsieh prepares for a skydive in Pingtung County for her show *Fun Taiwan* in this undated photo.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY JANET HSIEH

Janet Hsieh finds fun and unexpected opportunities

DONE IT ALL: From pre-med student at MIT to the host of Discovery travel shows, Janet is happy to have found something that she wasn't looking for when she arrived

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

From diving with oyster farmers to visiting cargo-loading docks in Kaohsiung to playing baseball with the world famous Red Leaf little leaguers in Taitung, 28-year old former pre-med student Janet Hsieh (謝怡芬) has done it all.

"I never imagined that I would be a travel show host, but now I am hooked," said Janet Hsieh, a Taiwanese-American who has been called one of the fastest rising It-girls in the domestic entertainment industry.

Her travel shows *Fun Taiwan* (瘋台灣) and *Fun Asia* (瘋亞洲) have become two of the most-watched programs on the Discovery Channel in the region.

Like Madonna or Cher, Janet is known by one name. The Houston, Texas, native who describes herself as "100 percent Taiwanese" has captivated the hearts of her Taiwanese audience with her long black hair, genuine smile and, above all, her near dare-devil courage to try anything at least once.

But Janet didn't always aspire

to be a travel show hostess. She thought she would end up donning a white lab coat and a stethoscope.

"When I was 16, that's when I decided that I really wanted to be a doctor," she said, recalling her experience as a young medical volunteer in the remote villages in Ecuador during high school. "People looked to me for health advice and I thought, wow, what more could I do if I were a doctor."

Her Ecuador excursion not only solidified her dream of becoming a physician, it also ignited a passion for traveling. After enrolling at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Janet divided her time between Spanish and biology classes with one dream in mind: to join Doctors Without Borders.

To increase her international experience, Janet traveled to Taiwan in September 2001 for the first time in her life for an internship as an emergency medical technician (EMT) at Taipei Veterans General Hospital.

Having mastered only a few Mandarin phrases, she was lumped with a group of firefighters at a local

fire department to work as an EMT for six months.

With luck on her side, the tall, sporty-looking taekwondo black belt soon landed a side job as a lingerie model.

"At first I had some conflicting feelings about whether or not to accept the job ... but I thought: I want to live a life without regrets, so I said yes."

The commercial, much to her surprise, drew lots of positive feedback. Soon, Janet's name was on speed dial for many commercial producers. And just when Janet was getting ready to pack her bags and bid farewell to Taiwan to start medical school at the University of Texas in Austin, an unexpected opportunity proved to be in store.

While saying goodbye to a friend, Janet learned of an opening for a travel show host on a new Discovery Channel program that features things to see and do in Taiwan.

The position was already closed, but the producer decided to give Janet a chance and let her audition.

Hosting *Fun Taiwan* has given her numerous opportunities to discover the beauty of Taiwan and its people, Janet said.

"I begin to really appreciate the simple things in life. Each time I eat an oyster omelet, I think that each one of those little oysters was

hand-dug by a farmer who had to dive under water."

One of the best things about the show, she said, is that it introduces amazing spots in Taiwan that are relatively easy to visit.

Janet has become such a dedicated travel host that during her interview with the *Taipei Times*, she stopped to give directions to tourists on how to get to the nearest night market when she overheard them talking about it.

Having trekked, biked, swum, eaten, danced and climbed all over this country, Janet is setting her sights set on the rest of the world.

"Taiwan is my home, but the world is my backyard," she said, saying that she aspires to be like her idols — travel show hosts such as Samantha Brown and Ian Wright, who have left their marks all over the globe.

But she hasn't lost her passion for health issues.

"I hope one day I can somehow use my name, my reputation, to help others by raising awareness on the importance of public health," she said.

With stamps from more than 36 countries in her passport, Janet said her wanderlust would not be waning any time soon.

"My motto has always been to live life without regrets, so *carpe diem!*"

Tearful reunion for eight Vietnamese winners of contest

BY SHELLEY HUANG
STAFF REPORTER

The upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival is a day when families in Taiwan get together, gaze at the full moon and chat over moon cakes.

But for many Vietnamese workers, family reunions are a luxury they cannot afford.

Eight Vietnamese workers were tearfully reunited with their parents last Tuesday during a Vietnamese family reunion activity at Radio Taiwan International (RTI).

The workers entered the room holding flower bouquets and ran toward their parents upon seeing them. Tears flowed as they greeted and hugged their parents.

CONTEST

Promoted through Vietnamese radio programs on RTI FM, employers of Vietnamese laborers were invited to participate by sending letters of recommendation to the station.

“When I first came to Taiwan in April 2004, I felt very lonely, but my employer has been very good to me and the Vietnamese programs on RTI have always been with us.”

— Toan Nguyen, Vietnamese worker

Among the more than 100 letters received, eight stood out and were selected.

The parents of these eight winners received free round-trip tickets from Vietnam, accommodation and a whole week of transportation, as well as other activities during their stay in Taiwan — all paid for by RTI and several private sponsors. Each also received NT\$3,000 in red envelopes.

SHARING JOY

One winner, Toan Nguyen, tearfully shared her joy with the audience.

"When I first came to Taiwan in April 2004, I felt very lonely, but my employer has been very good to me and the Vietnamese programs on RTI have always been with us," she said.

She also impressed the audience by extending good wishes to everyone in Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese).

The activity was organized by RTI, Voice of Han Broadcasting and the Police Radio Station of Taiwan.

NO COINCIDENCE

Sept. 2 was chosen so that it would coincide with Vietnam National Day, said Ngu Yen Cong Manh (阮公孟), deputy head of the Vietnam Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei.

Taiwanese children and their Vietnamese mothers celebrate the upcoming Mid-Autumn festival at an event in Tainan County on Sunday. The festival falls on Saturday.

PHOTO: YANG CHIN-CHENG, TAIPEI TIMES



Director of BTCO is hooked on Taiwan's rail system

GETTING ON TRACK: Michael Reilly says that Taiwan's rich railway heritage is a bit of a hidden secret, and he suggests the nation promote the sector to tourists

BY SHELLEY SHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Michael Reilly is known in Taiwan's diplomatic circle as the director of the British Trade and Cultural Office (BTCO), but few probably know that he is also a railway fan.

"I would call myself an 'average' railway fan," Reilly said in an interview with the *Taipei Times*. "I like traveling by trains, but I've never done that to the exclusion of something else."

"I don't think my wife will consider herself a train widow," he joked.

During his second visit to Taiwan in 1974, Reilly checked out the Alishan Railway as he had heard it was still using the Shay locomotive, a US-made steam engine specifically designed for logging railways.

And when he returned two years ago to assume the post as the BTCO director, he soon joined the Railway Culture Society, Taiwan (鐵道文化協會), becoming one of its few foreign members.

Reilly has toured Taiwan on both Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) and Taiwan High Speed Rail Corp (THSRC) trains.

He named the TRA's Pingshi Line (平溪線) and the South Link (南迴線) as two of his favorite railway

lines in Taiwan.

The Pingshi Line runs from Houtong (侯桐) to Jintong (菁桐) in Taipei County.

Reilly says the rural line has "all the charm of a brunch line," particularly the scenery in Shifen (十分).

The South Link — connecting Kaohsiung and Taitung — is a slightly busier but nonetheless scenic route.

"You go through the tunnels and spectacular waterfalls and come across the scenery of the East Coast. That, to me, rivals any of the alpine lines," he said.

Reilly said that the construction of the high-speed rail system was impressive and has made a difference in the way people travel in Taiwan.

"There are very few countries in the world that have got dedicated high speed lines," he said. "Building a line like [the high speed rail], where you have very high population density, challenges of earthquakes and all the rest of it, is a big feat."

Coming from a small town in the northwest of England, Reilly became interested in railways when he was about nine years old. To pass the time, he and other boys would watch the trains go by at the railway station, which was a short

walk from his house.

Reilly was impressed by the friendliness of railway people in general.

"In those days, crews on the engine would chat to small boys on the platform. This makes you feel that you are part of the bigger adult world," he said.

Reilly's fascination with the variety of steam locomotives — as well as daydreams of taking a train to somewhere exotic — also explain why he became a railway enthusiast.

Having a doctorate in urban transport, Reilly was once offered a job at the London Transport. Though tempted to take the position, he eventually chose to work for the foreign service instead.

Nowadays, he sometimes drives steam engines on private railway lines in the UK for fun. Reilly said that he did not know the historical connection between the UK and Taiwan in the railway sector before he came. He was surprised to learn that one of the two locomotives displayed in front of the National Taiwan Museum was built by the British company Avonside in 1871. The electrification of the TRA main line was done by a British firm as well, he said.

The nation's high speed rail system also adopted the Independent



Michael Reilly, director of the British Trade and Cultural Office, stands next to a picture of a CK101-model train locomotive in his Taipei office. The picture was a gift from Vice Minister of Transportation and Communications Ho Nuen-huen.

PHOTO: SHELLEY SHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

Verification and Validation System, a certification mechanism for safety imported from the UK.

Reilly is aware that people in Taiwan complain a great deal about the two railway services, particularly about the lateness of the trains. He has found, however, that both TRA and THSRC trains were by and large punctual. Some of the complaints were unjustified, he said, given the density of the network and overall frequency and

reliability of the systems.

Reilly was also amazed at the rich railway heritage that Taiwan possesses. Aside from the Alishan Railway, he said the fan-shaped railway depot in Changhua County, built in 1922, was a well-preserved historical treasure.

Currently, the depot also keeps two functional locomotives.

Reilly encouraged the nation to advertise its railway culture more in the international community.