



PIGEON POST

Songkran Festival to be held on Sunday

FESTIVAL The annual Songkran Festival, better known as the Water-Splashing Holiday, will be held at Taoyuan County Stadium on Sunday. Thousands of migrant workers from all over Taiwan are expected to take part in the event celebrating the beginning of the Thai New Year. It is also a day observed by many Southeast Asian cultures.

The Thailand Trade and Economic Office said that as the county has the largest population of Thai workers in Taiwan, the office had worked with the county government to host the festival. Everybody is invited to attend and sample Thai culture.

Aside from the traditional water-splashing, the event will also feature live music and dances performed by troupes from Thailand.

Documentary on Catholic nun premieres

OPENING A documentary of the life of Marjorie Ingelev Bly will premiere tomorrow in Penghu to commemorate the first anniversary of her passing and show her lifelong dedication to helping lepers in Taiwan. The American Catholic nun came to Taiwan in the 1950s during the peak of leprosy in the country. As a young woman, Bly chose to settle in Penghu, which at the time lacked medical care. The film, shot by Good TV, took one year to make and chronicles Bly's life both growing up in the US and her work in Taiwan.

Tomorrow's event is co-sponsored by the Penghu County Government, the Taiwan Lutheran Church and the United Association of Christian Groups in Penghu. For tickets, contact secretary-general of the association Lin Pei-chun (林佩君) at (06) 972-0414.

STAFF WRITER

TAS mothers give gift of English

NO PRESENCE REQUIRED: Using the power of the Internet, Taipei American School mothers are reaching remote areas and helping Aboriginal students learn English

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

Looking up with her big brown eyes, Mary Chi (紀詩伶) nodded shyly while biting her lower lip when asked if one day she'd like to be a famous pop star.

"And as a singer, you have to be able to sing English songs and that's why I need to learn to speak and read English," she said.

Shih, 11, a fifth grader from Ping-Jing Elementary School in Nantou County, is one of 20 Aboriginal students from the Sediq tribe participating in a long-distance online English tutorial program provided by a group of volunteer mothers from Taipei American School (TAS).

The seed of the program was planted two years ago when a speaker invited by the Chinese Parent Connection at TAS spoke of the rural outreach education program to the Aboriginal community.

Casey Lin, one of the mothers who listened to the speech, was touched by the subject and was

eventually introduced to the 51-year-old elementary school nestled in the mountainous region of Jenai Township (仁愛).

The school was among the casualties of the 921 earthquake in 1999 in which an entire building of classrooms was flattened and several walls crumbled.

During last year's spring break, Lin and a group of TAS mothers brought some students to the tree-lined campus in the deep mountains to discover a world that is quite different from the concrete jungle they have become accustomed to in Taipei.

During the visit, the parents realized that the small school of 64 students, which teaches children from kindergarten through sixth grade, did not have a full-time English-language teacher.

"It is very difficult for the school to find a full time English teacher because of the remoteness of the place. Not many people are willing to travel so far," school principal Tseng Yuan-hsin (曾元信) said, recalling that prior

to the opening of Freeway No. 6, it would take almost two hours to get to the nearest town — Puli (埔里), Nantou County.

The discovery prompted Lin to organize a program to enable students to learn English in the absence of a teacher.

"There's got to be something we can do, we thought," Lin said.

Piggybacking on the existing computer infrastructure and an online learning platform already set up at the school by a local university, a group of eight mothers decided to offer a remote learning program to 10 first and 10 fifth graders.

It is that spirit of service that prompts the mothers to turn on their home computers every Tuesday and Friday at 8:30am to teach the students English — from simple conversational phrases to phonetic pronunciation — via Web cam.

The result, said Sylvia Tai, one of the TAS volunteers, was most evident when five of the recipients volunteered to introduce themselves in English onstage during the TAS annual Spring

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— Adan Sun, 11-year-old student at Ping-Jing Elementary School in Nantou County

Fair, where they performed traditional Sediq dancing.

"I felt very proud of them to muster up the courage to introduce themselves on stage," Tai said, applauding the children for their willingness to speak English in public, something that was nearly impossible in the past given their shy nature.

Tai, a housewife, said that one of the purposes of the program was to boost the self-confidence of children by giving them ample opportunities to succeed.

She shared a story of a hyperactive boy who had been labeled as a troubled student. The volunteers decided to give him one-on-one attention.

Without using extra materials and by simply showering him

with the attention he needed, "months later, his teacher was happy to report that his grades had improved."

The program has not only benefited the Ping-Jing students, but it is also a learning experience for TAS children, said Lin, adding that several TAS students have visited the Nantou school to personally interact with the Sediq children.

"We would arrange some activities to let TAS students lead a small group of Ping-Jing students. In exchange, the Ping-Jing students taught them about their traditional weaving and introduced them to their aboriginal food and culture," Lin said.

Calling the TAS mothers a blessing to the schools, Tseng said the children always look forward to their online English learning time.

"The moms do more than teach English. They also provide much emotional nourishment to the students," he said.

Eleven-year-old Adan Sun (孫浩亞), an aspiring truck driver, said it was fun to learn English from the TAS mothers because "they are so kind and nice."

"I want to study English because maybe one day I will drive trucks in the US," he said.

FEATURE



ON A MISSION

Foreign missionaries help local residents care for their graves at Houjia cemetery in Tainan on Saturday, which was Tomb-Sweeping Day.

PHOTO: HUANG PO-LANG, TAIPEI TIMES

Missionary's long love story with Taiwan

'A REAL TAIWANESE': Despite his age, Giovanni Petrin has opened a new sanitarium in Sansing. With donations drying up, contractors will have to be paid in installments

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

Italian Catholic missionary Giovanni Petrin is more like a friend than a director to residents of the nursing home he established and has run in Ilan for several decades.

Every day Petrin, 75, who has been in Taiwan for more than 50 years, checks each of the approximately 60 residents at the Wanshan Sanitarium in Ilan County's Dongshan Township (東山), bringing a touch of humor and gaiety to cheer up his sick, weak and elderly charges.

The Wanshan Sanitarium was formerly a shelter for tuberculosis patients, but as the disease became less prevalent, it was transformed 16 years ago into a nursing home for people with Alzheimer's and senile dementia, as well as people in a vegetative state.

Petrin, credited with taking care of more than 8,000 Taiwanese TB patients over the decades, plays with the residents, listens to them

babbling, and speaks to them in Mandarin and sometimes in Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese).

He is adept at calming his charges when they become agitated and swears by the effectiveness of the candies he always carries around.

Petrin, who came to Taiwan in 1956 as a missionary and nurse at the age of 23, has been director of the Wanshan Sanitarium since 1971. The facility is a branch of St Mary's Hospital in Ilan's Luodong Township (羅東), which was established by the Order of St Camillus of Italy more than half a century ago.

Petrin was a compassionate and brave nurse during the early years of the sanitarium, said Chen Su-luan (陳素蓮), who was Petrin's secretary for more than 30 years and who still works for him as an aide even after retirement.

Chen said Petrin was never afraid

to come into close contact with TB patients, who sometimes threw up blood into the faces of medical personnel. He also performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation on patients on several occasions, Chen said.

Over the years, Petrin has been cited several times by both the central government and the Ilan County Government for his devotion.

He was lauded as "a real Taiwanese" in 2003 by then-minister of the interior Yu Cheng-hsien (余政憲) during a ceremony to honor him and five other foreign missionaries who served at St Mary's Hospital in Luodong and its affiliated organizations. He has also been praised as "the best Ilan citizen" by former Ilan County commissioner Liu Shou-cheng (劉守成).

Petrin's good reputation has even reached Italy, his home country, which he has visited fewer than five times over the past 53 years. He was conferred with the prestigious Gardino Roma medal by the Italian government in 2007

Italian Catholic missionary Giovanni Petrin shares a joke with a patient at Wanshan Sanitarium in Ilan County's Dongshan Township on March 15.

for his work abroad.

Since he was awarded permanent residence in 2003, Petrin says he is now Taiwanese and that Taiwan is his home.

Despite his advanced age, Petrin for several years sought a new site to build a larger nursing home to replace the Wanshan Sanitarium, which is old and too small.

Construction at the new nursing home, in Ilan's Sansing Township (三星) is expected to be completed this month and inaugurated in July, said Huang Jung-kuan, who will be its director.

The new facility, to be named the St Camillus Long-term Care Home, will also have a clinic manned by professionals from St Mary's Hospital, he said.

Huang, who solicited public donations to help build the new nursing home, said payments to the builders and contractors will have to be made in installments as the donations received by the Wanshan Sanitarium have dropped by about half over the last year.

"The global economic recession has really tightened its grip on disadvantaged groups," Huang said.



PHOTO: CNA

Citizen reporters take Taiwan on the global stage

THE WORLD'S A STAGE: After a series of interviews with CNN staff, a pair of citizen reporters was able to air their iReport on a pro-Tibet rally in Taipei

BY **DAN BLOOM**
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

For two Milwaukee, Wisconsin, natives, Taiwan has served as a stepping stone to international attention by being citizen journalists for CNN's popular iReport news program.

Joe Seydewitz, 39, and Michelle Senzi, 27, have lived in Taipei for the past two years and a recent news video they sent to CNN headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia was picked up last month for an international news program.

Now the US couple are looking for more stories to send in to CNN about life in Taiwan.

In a recent interview, Seydewitz, who has taught international business at a Taipei college for the past two years, explained how the CNN gig came about.

"Michelle and I happened upon a Free Tibet rally near our apartment on Zhongxiao East Road in Taipei," Seydewitz said. "The rally's message was directed firmly at China, particularly Chinese President Hu Jintao [胡锦涛]. Chants included: 'Stop the Killing' and 'Free Tibet' and what sounded like 'Who's the killer? Hu Jintao!'"

Michelle was the cameraman and I was the street reporter. We had no idea it would eventually air on CNN, but it did."

TIBET

The rally was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising and support for Tibetans' struggle for freedom.

Seydewitz said that along the route of the protest rally he spoke with a young Tibetan man who said that since Taiwan is free of Chinese Communist Party control, "the rally and its message rang loud and clear."

Seydewitz said the man "seemed quite proud to be Tibetan, as well as pleased to have a forum to speak openly in."

Asked if the iReport was his first one for CNN, Seydewitz said: "Yes, it was. I watch CNN often, mostly to keep-up on US political and economic news, but also for global current events. So I've watched the iReport program on CNN several times and was intrigued by the possibility of doing my own story one day. I really like the format and the endless

possibilities. I sent the Tibet rally video to CNN as my iReport because I had the feeling, by being there in the streets that day, that it was a serious story about an intense, globally recognized political situation, and I thought iReport would at least consider using it."

Seydewitz said he has felt like a citizen journalist for several years.

"When I was living in the US, before coming to Taiwan, I wrote some comedy material for a comedy group in Chicago. I always considered myself, before this, to be an 'observer' of people and life, and humor was my main interest. As a so-called citizen journalist, I'm still observing things, but not exclusively to find humor now."

Asked what was next, Seydewitz said that with the first iReport aired worldwide last month, he and Michelle were excited about future story ideas.

"It's hard not to keep thinking about potential story ideas now," he said. "I am evaluating everything that I see and think about here in Taipei now, based on a quick assessment of its newsworthiness for the CNN audience. I'm considering doing a video story that relates to the global economy as seen from here in Taiwan."

CREDENTIALS

Errol Barnett, a 29-year-old Briton educated in California, hosts the iReport program on CNN. When Seydewitz was asked how CNN contacted him and Michelle about using their video submission for its on-air show, he said that a CNN employee first e-mailed him to confirm his identity. Later, he spoke with a CNN producer in the US.

"In fact, I was vetted and questioned via telephone, e-mail and Web cam by a handful of CNN iReport staff," he said. "My most lengthy conversation was with the show's producer in Atlanta. I did the Web cam interview that aired on CNN from my home computer here in Taipei."

Seydewitz said the entire experience of working with CNN was "a pretty cool way to tell a story and be heard by a lot of people around the world."

"The entire process was great, from capturing the footage on the streets here in Taipei, to communicating with CNN staff and then eventually seeing myself actually reporting the story on television for a global audience. I am going to keep my eyes open for anything else here in Taiwan and around Asia that might be of interest for future iReports," he said.