



PIGEON POST

Flea Market comes to Taichung

MARKET Morrison Academy Taichung campus' annual Senior's Flea Market is being held on Saturday from 9am to 1pm. The school said it will be the biggest event of its kind in Taichung City with thousands of second-hand items for sale. Refreshments will also be available. Admission is NT\$500. For information on renting a stall or donating items, contact the school on (04) 2292-1171.

Taipei promotes language contest

CONTEST A Mandarin/Hoklo speech contest for foreigners in Taiwan sponsored by the Taipei City Government will be held next month. The city government is inviting individuals to share their thoughts about the city and potentially win big prizes. Foreigners who have lived in Taiwan for less than six years are eligible to enter the contest. The theme of the contest is "Having Fun in Taipei," and participants should prepare a three-minute speech in Mandarin or Hoklo to share their recommendations of fun spots in Taipei City, the city government said. To enter, download application forms at www.rti.org.tw and send them by mail, e-mail or fax to Radio Taiwan International. A primary round of the contest will be held at 1pm on May 11 at the Grand Hotel. The final will be held at 1pm on May 24 at the Warner Village Pedestrian Area. The winner will take home NT\$30,000 and a Grand Hotel voucher, the city government said. For more information, visit www.rti.org.tw or www.taipeitravel.net or call (02) 2885 6168 ext. 722.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

Center helps Filipinos get ahead

HOME FROM HOME: Roy and Heidi Villaluna offer their compatriots more than just help with software and networks, providing food and moral support

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

For Imelda Constantino, practicing typing for hours on end in a cramped computer lab is her idea of a perfect Sunday.

With her eyes fixed on a computer monitor, the Filipina caregiver tried hard not to look down at her fingers as they danced across the keyboard while typing words as fast and accurately as she possibly could.

"I am here because I know learning more about computers will help me in the future," she said shyly, whipping her body around to get back to her typing.

Constantino is one of the 50 of overseas Filipino workers enrolled in E-PC, a data processing and computer literacy center established in 2003 by Roy and Heidi Villaluna, who said that knowing their compatriots are benefitting from the class is all the reward they need for the painstaking efforts of maintaining the center.

Roy is a project manager at the notebook division of one of Taiwan's best-known computer

companies who speaks with a soft yet determined voice, especially when talking about the center.

"My wife and I just want to help our compatriots. This is something we can do to help them. These people are like family to us," said the computer engineer.

Nestled in the heart of Little Manila off Zhongshan N Road in Taipei, the 30-plus ping (100m²) second-floor center is located a block away from St. Christopher's Church, a home away from home for many Filipinos.

The center is divided into three sections. In the back is a small makeshift mini mart full of Philippine treats and items. Next to it is a lecture area where Roy can often be seen standing in front of a white board scribbling down computer jargon.

Then the most popular hang-out: the computer area, lined with 20 computers all assembled by Roy, bustling with eager students who can't wait to get on the Web cam to chat with their friends and families.

The center is open on Sundays from 8:30am to 6:30pm and offers an array of courses ranging from computer fundamentals to Windows to troubleshooting all for NT\$1,800. The fee includes a lifetime EPC membership and unconditional hospitality from the Villalunas.

For those who can't pay, Roy smiled, shrugged his shoulders and said, "that's okay, what we really ask for is their dedication and sincerity. If they want to learn, then I will teach. They can pay whenever they can. If they can't pay, then never mind."

"We really see them as our families. I always cook enough so anyone who doesn't have lunch or dinner is welcome to eat with us. Many of them also tell me about their troubles at work and I give them advice and encourage them not to give up," said Heidi who holds a bachelor of science in information technology.

Caregiver Norma Benevista, who



Heidi and Roy Villaluna stand in front of computer parts in the lecture area of their computer center in Taipei last month.

PHOTO: JENNY W. HSU, TAIPEI TIMES

has been coming to the center for two years and is learning about spreadsheets, said her dream was to open her own business when she gets home.

"I know what I learn here will be very useful for me in the future to help me and my family," she said.

Heidi said that a former student who has since returned to the Philippines had opened an Internet café in her home town. Several others, thanks to their computer knowledge, had found better jobs in Taiwan, Canada and Hong Kong, she said.

The next step for the Villalunas,

she said, was to follow the suggestion of Representative Antonio Basilio of the Manila Economic and Culture Office to organize a volunteer group with the skills to teach computer literacy to Filipinos who cannot travel to Taipei.

In addition to tutorials, the center also offers computer services at a low price such as Windows OS and software installation, personal computer upgrading and assembly, network layout and laptop and PC repair.

For more information on the center call (02) 2592-5926 or e-mail epcpc2003@yahoo.com

Japanese walks for world

LONG JOURNEY: Yuji Miyata has long been interested in green issues and intends to walk around the globe until the Earth takes a turn for the better environmentally

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

A 26-year-old Japanese man began a three-month walk around Taiwan to raise environmental awareness in Tainan City on Wednesday.

Yuji Miyata attended World Earth Day activities sponsored by the Tainan City Government before embarking on his walk. He arrived in Tainan a day earlier, having completed walks in Hong Kong, Beijing, South Korea and Okinawa over the past year.

Miyata said he became concerned about environmental issues

at the age of six after watching a television report on holes in the ozone layer caused by pollutants in the atmosphere.

He said he was greatly inspired by Paul Coleman — earthwalker, tree planter and environmentalist — in late 2007, became a vegetarian and embarked on a global journey to deliver his message on the environment.

He said he has walked 4,400km through three nations over the past 14 months. Without much money in his pocket, he said, he is often

provided with shelter and given food and water by strangers.

"It's a wonderful feeling camping in the wild for the night after having nothing but water for two or three days," Miyata said.

A determined Miyata said even his parents' worries would not change his decision to walk around the globe.

"I'll keep walking around the globe until the Earth takes a turn for the better environmentally," he vowed.

After the Taiwan walk, he said he will proceed to other Asian countries before heading for the Middle East and Europe.

He said he got to know Chang Huang-chen (張皇珍), director of Tainan City Government's Environmental Protection Bureau, via a US World Earth Day Web site, prompting him to organize the Taiwan leg of his walk.

For his part, Chang said he would write letters to local governments nationwide asking them to provide hospitality to Miyata and cheer him along.

Since 1990, Coleman, a British citizen, has walked 47,500km through 39 nations, planting trees and encouraging people to preserve the natural environment, delivering the environmental message from the jungles of the Amazon to the highlands of Zimbabwe and even into war zones.

In 2000, Coleman began a campaign to plant 100 million trees, one for every man, woman and child killed in the last century of war. Thanks to the support of people around the world, he says, at least 11,350,000 trees have been planted so far.



Yuji Miyata, right, who began a three-month walk around Taiwan last Wednesday, shakes hands with Tainan Mayor Hsu Tain-tsair while attending World Earth Day activities sponsored by the Tainan City Government the day before embarking on his walk.

PHOTO: TSAI WEN-CHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Father Aloisius fights scourge of leprosy with a smile

HELPING HAND: Father Aloisius Gutheinz had ambitions of being a French horn player in his youth but an encounter with a priest while mending a fence changed his life

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Donning a black fishing hat and red sweater, Father Aloisius Gutheinz looked like a typical grandfather repeating tales of his fishing expeditions back in the good old days.

But instead, the silver-haired man with a permanent smile across his face throughout his two-hour interview with the *Taipei Times* had a far more sober tale to tell about the lives of leprosy sufferers in Taiwan.

Founder of the Chinese Leprosy Service (CLS), Gutheinz, also known as Father Gu Han-song (谷寒松), said during his 30-year association with those afflicted with the degenerative condition, not once did he fear catching the disease that often leaves its victims deformed.

"Don't ever say that leprosy is a punishment. These people are human beings who are equally valued in the eyes of God," he said.

Gutheinz said that God created an imperfect world, "so we can have a chance to learn how to love the way God loves. We wouldn't have to the chance to love different type of people if the world was perfect."

But even Gutheinz, who answered the call to become a priest when he was a high school sophomore, had to wrangle with his share of struggles when he first met people with leprosy, or Hansen's Disease, in September 1975, 14 years after he arrived in Taiwan.

"An Italian father took me to visit a place called Yi-yuan (怡園). I had no idea what it was before I went there. When I got there, I saw 12 people [burdened] with two heavy illnesses. One was leprosy and the other was mental illness. I trembled when I saw that," he said, describing the feeling of injustice and frustration he felt.

Kneeling inside a chapel,

Gutheinz said he cried in devotion to God as an attempt to find an answer to justify the utter despair he witnessed.

"I said to God, you cannot permit this Lord. I am against it. I cannot agree with it," he said. "Half an hour later, peace swelled up from the depth of my heart and I heard God say to me in Chinese, Father Gu, you go ahead and do you what you need to do for the lepers and I will take care of the rest."

Describing that moment in the chapel as his third vocation in life, Gutheinz said from then on, he had neither fears nor doubts that he was to serve those suffering from the disease.

Working closely with people battling with leprosy is not what Gutheinz had in mind as a career when growing up in Europe.

Born in 1933 in a small Austrian town near the Alps, the future Jesuit priest aspired to become a surgeon or a French Horn player.

One day, a Catholic priest approached him and his father while the pair were fixing the family fence. The priest asked his father if he would allow his second son to study to enter the Church.

"My father was so taken back," he said, but he left the decision for his son to make, a gesture Gutheinz said he was grateful for.

Retreating to his safe place — a nearby chapel — the young Gutheinz sought clarity from God on what he should do. The next day, he told his family that he wished to enter a seminary. With the full blessing of his family, Gutheinz eventually entered the Society of Jesus and began his lifelong work.

Gutheinz recalled that when his mother received the news that her son was heading to China on his mission, her only fear was that he would not be able to tell the locals apart because "all Chinese look so much alike," he said with a chuckle.

Tragically, Gutheinz's mother died of a heart attack three days prior to his departure.

"I was so sad, but I said to

"Don't ever say that leprosy is a punishment. These people are human beings who are equally valued in the eyes of God."

— Aloisius Gutheinz, founder of the Chinese Leprosy Service

my mom, 'you come with me to China. You love China so much. You come with me,' and she did and she still does," he said, adding that he believes his mother is loving every minute of his Taiwanese adventure.

When Gutheinz began his work with the leprosy patients in Lo Sheng Sanatorium in 1975, the center housed more than 800 people. Now, the number is down to 247.

Thanks to a multi-drug therapy (MDT), all the residents at Lo Sheng have been cured, even though many are scarred for life.

Gutheinz said there was a huge misunderstanding that people affected with leprosy are contagious. The fact is, as long as a sufferer adheres to their MDT regimen, the bacteria are contained and they are

not infectious, he said.

Looking towards the future, Gutheinz said the next step was to educate the public to remove the stigma that many have about the disease.

"You can shake their [lepers] hands, you can hug them. Just come and spend time with them," he said, urging more volunteers to go to Lo Sheng to see the sanatorium for themselves.

Now the leprosy situation in Taiwan is under control, Gutheinz is looking to expand the CLS services to China, where there are an estimated 30,000 plus people with the disease in more than 800 leprosy villages.

For more information about volunteering at Lo Sheng, see: www.lslp.doh.gov.tw or call (02) 8200-6600.



SWEEPING CHANGE

A group of young people from the organization "Up With People" cleans up a street in Yuanlin Township, Changhua County, on Saturday. After giving a performance in Yuanlin on April 19, the group, which is touring Taiwan, offered community service between last Tuesday and Friday.

PHOTO: JUAN YI-YU, TAIPEI TIMES

Tourism fair turns spotlight on the splendors of Spain

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

The Taipei-based Spanish Chamber of Commerce (CCE) held a tourism fair last Wednesday inviting 200 local travel agents to explore the diversity of Spain's tourism with the aim of increasing the number of visitors from Taiwan.

CCE director-general Jose-Luis Lamas said the fair was designed not only to promote Spain as a tourist destination for Taiwanese people but also to increase their awareness and knowledge of the country.

FURTHER AFIELD

Ignacio Ducasse, director of the Spanish Tourism Office in Tokyo — which covers Spain's tourism business in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea — said that while 90 percent of Spain's tourists come from Europe, the country wants to boost numbers of visitors from further afield.

"We believe that in Taiwan we have strong potential for attracting visitors to Spain. For that reason, Taiwan is a very important market for us," Ducasse said.

"We believe that in Taiwan we have strong potential for attracting visitors to Spain."

— Ignacio Ducasse, director of the Spanish Tourism Office

Ducasse said that compared with other Asian countries, Taiwan has one of the highest numbers of travelers to Spain, with an average of 30,000 per year, a number that has been growing steadily over the past decade.

While Taiwanese are familiar with Spain for its culture, art, sports, fashion and food, Spain has much more to offer, he said.

SUNNY

Maria-Luisa Fernandez, deputy director of new markets for Spain's Institute of Tourism, said Spain is a "green, sunny and modern tourist destination."

The country also has a rich cultural legacy with some 40 historic sites and 13 cities declared as UNESCO world heritage sites, she said.

These include the Alhambra in Granada, the architectural legacy of Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona and El Escorial in Madrid.

The tourism fair provided travel agents with the latest tourist information and will help them organize various kinds of tourist itineraries for Taiwanese customers, Fernandez said.