Woodbury Bulletin - October 31, 2018

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**Woodbury Bulletin**

Wednesday, October 31, 2018

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**ST. PAUL-CHANGSHA CHINA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN TO HOST OPEN HOUSE**

By Hannah Black

St. Paul

Changsha, China, and St. Paul may be distant in geography, but a space linking the two will soon open in Phalen Regional Park.

Representatives from the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society will host an open house for the St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden from 1-2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 3. There will be guided tours of the garden in English, Chinese and Hmong. Visiters will also be treated to Chinese and Hmong music and hot tea.

"It's more beautiful than anything we imagined when we started this project several years ago," said Linda Mealey-Lohmann, president and co-founder of the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society.

Mealey-Lohmann, a Woodbury resident, and the society's co-founder, C.C. Hiaow, were the masterminds behind the garden's conception and completion, the garden's main structure

"I think it just gonna be a great place for people to gather and picnic and contemplate and meditate and all of these good things," said Mealey-Lohmann, president and co-founder of the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society.

Save the date

The garden will host its formal grand opening on Nov. 3, on the 9th day of the Oregon, which is an important date in Chinese culture.

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"Fostering cross-cultural understanding and friendship goes.

Raising money to create the garden was also a joint effort.

Those who donated at least $1,000 to the project would have their name added to a "donor wall" in the garden.

"You look and there's Chinese names and there's Hmong names and there's names of community members that live in Phalen Park and around the Twin Cities," Mealey-Lohmann said.

This summer, the group surpassed $1 million in fundraising for the project, she said.

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Most of the garden’s principal structures will be completed in time for the open house, though a granite archway over its west entrance will begin construction the following week. The bulk of the landscaping will happen in the spring.

Members of the Changsha community who helped plan the garden looked for flowers that grow in their city, as well as look-alikes that would better thrive in a northern climate. They also included flowers, such as peonies, chrysanthemums and rhododendrons, that they thought could grow in Changsha.

Red maples will be planted around the Xiang Jiang Pavilion to evoke a similar feeling to the Aiwan Pavilion, which is also surrounded by red maples.

In the future, the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society plans to expand upon the garden’s structures. Mealey-Lohmann said a Hmong Cultural Plaza, an enclosed classroom pavilion, a Tai Qi plaza, a covered walkway and a small viewing pavilion are planned.

“We think it’s just gonna be a great place for people to gather and picnic and contemplate and meditate and all of those good things,” she said.