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### Chinese pavilion, gift from a sister city, unveiled at Phalen Regional Park

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Visitors to the unveiling of the Xiang Jiang Pavilion in Phalen Regional Park on Saturday sipped hot tea and listened to a performer play a qeej as they admired the gift from St. Paul's sister city, Changsha in the Hunan province of China.

"It's very beautiful," said Amy Look of Ramsey of the double-roofed pavilion with sweeping eaves that is a replica of China's famous 18th century Aiwan Pavilion.



*Anna Look, 6, left, of Ramsey, and her friend Kailyn Jiang, 7, of Brooklyn Park, play Saturday, Nov. 3, 2018 in front of the new Xiang Jiang Pavilion, a gift from St. Paul's sister city Changsha in China. The pavilion is the first phase of a 1.2 acre China garden in Phalen Park. The girls' mothers said they came to the event to teach their daughters about their Chinese heritage. (Deanna Weniger / Pioneer Press)*

She and her friend Lee Jiang of Brooklyn Park said they came to the event to teach their daughters, Anna Look, 6, and Kailyn Jiang, 7, about their Chinese heritage.

Others came out of curiosity, having learned of the event through the St. Paul Parks and Recreation department. And others, like Minnesota Senator Fong Hawj, came to see the realization of a 30-year dream.

Hawj said that when the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society first started planning the friendship garden, he thought they'd appeal to the deep pockets of local corporate businesses.

“I thought, this should be easy,” he said. “But they said no. We had to take a step back and draw in the community.”

No one was interested in building a China friendship garden until it was explained that Changsha, the capital of China’s Hunan Province, was actually the ancestral origin of the Hmong people who expanded into Vietnam and Laos centuries ago.

Soon locals saw the connection between the garden and their own Hmong community. Within the Twin Cities, St. Paul has the largest Hmong population with nearly 30,000. Learning that they could have a piece of their ancestral city brought to their new homeland was motivating.

“Most of the donations for this were from individuals. It took a lot of collaboration, and as you can see,” he said, gesturing to the crowd of mostly Hmong, “it brings the community together.”

What did Changsha get out of the deal? [Five statues of Peanuts characters will be placed in Yanghu Wetlands Park](#), the sister park to St. Paul’s Phalen Regional. One Peanuts character will don traditional Hmong clothing, another will feature Snoopy on his doghouse and will have Minnesota symbols painted on it like the loon and the lady slipper flower. The Peanuts cartoons were the work of Charles Schulz, who grew up in St. Paul.

While Changsha gave St. Paul the pavilion, and even sent over Chinese engineers to construct it, the society had to come up with \$1 million to build the foundation and put in signage, boulders and mulch. [It’s the first phase of a \\$7 million project](#) that includes an entrance arch, a pagoda-like lakeside pavilion and a Hmong cultural plaza.

Chen Zhou, chairman of the Chinese advisory group to the project and a board member of the society, said he was pleased with the interest the project has inspired.

“We’re just really glad to have people talking about cultural exchange rather than trade wars,” he said. He’s already had several requests to hold weddings in the pavilion and many questions about its heritage and meaning. “People really want to learn,” he said.



