The Story Behind the Garden by Linda Mealey-Lohmann, Co-Founder of MCFGS

St. Paul – Changsha Sister City Relationship is 32-Years Strong

This international sister-city relationship between St. Paul and Changsha in Hunan Province, China, began in 1985. It started with an initial exchange of letters between then Saint Paul Mayor George Latimer and Changsha Mayor Wang Keying. Then, in 1986, Dr. P. Richard Bohr, Executive Director of the Midwest China Center, delivered a written proposal to Mayor Latimer encouraging the establishment of an official relationship to foster economic, cultural, and educational opportunities, and to form the Saint Paul-Changsha Sister City Committee.

In 1988, when Mayor Latimer and others, including Weiming Lu (MCFGS Advisor), traveled to Changsha for the official signing of the Sister-City agreement with Changsha Mayor Song, the proposal became a reality. In 2008, St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and others, including Bill Pesek (MCFGS Advisor) visited Changsha for a 20-year anniversary Friendship Memorandum Signing event. Again, in 2015, Mayor Coleman led a delegation with MCFGS Board Members to sign documents establishing the sister-park relationship between Phalen Regional Park and Changsha Yanghu Wetlands Park.

In 2019, MN Senator Foung Hawj, City Councilmember Dai Thao, and MCFGS President Linda Mealey-Lohmann led a delegation to Changsha to celebrate the sister-city gift exchange and the official unveiling of the 5 Peanuts Statues gift to Changsha’s Yanghu Wetlands Park Museum.

The Creation of the MN China Friendship Garden Society

MCFGS began as the China Garden Committee of the US-China Peoples Friendship Association-Minnesota Chapter (Mary Warpeha, President) with the goal of founders C.C. Hsiao and Linda Mealey-Lohmann to build Sister-City China Friendship Gardens in the Twin Cities. MCFGS was incorporated in 2005 as a non-profit, all-volunteer organization. Its goal is to build China Friendship Gardens, based on Minnesota’s sister-city relationships, to enhance friendship and understanding between the people of China and Minnesota. After years of research, MCFGS focused on the St. Paul-Changsha sister-city relationship and the opportunity to build a China Friendship Garden at Phalen Regional Park in St. Paul. As conceptual plans were developed for this China Garden, the formal name of “Liu Ming Yuan” – the St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden of Whispering Willows and Flowing Waters was selected to reflect nearby willow trees and flowing waters of Phalen Lake and Channel surrounding the site. Community involvement and Legislative action came as a result of a District 5 Community Council Meeting. In 2017, MCFGS formed Hmong and Chinese Advisory Groups to provide input to the MCFGS Board and ensure cultural authenticity and community input. The MCFGS board has dedicated thousands of hours to realize this dream of creating the first Sister-City China Friendship Garden in Minnesota. Linda Mealey-Lohmann, President from 2005 to 2020, oversaw the installation of the Xiang Jiang Pavilion, Hmong Heritage Wall, and West Entrance Archway in 2018 and 2019, Phase 1 of the China Friendship Garden.
Hello: My name is Bill Zajicek and I am the new President of the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society. Linda Mealey-Lohmann passed on the torch this February and moved to the less demanding role of Secretary of the Organization. She is definitely still active with the organization and you will no doubt hear from her from time to time.

A little history: this project of creating an authentic Sister-City China Garden in Minnesota represents a walk through the past 15+ years. My own involvement started almost 10 years ago when the master plan for the Phalen/Keller Regional Park came up for revision. As an active community member in the Phalen Lake area of St. Paul, I was involved in the revision of the Master Plan. One of many desired elements in the plan called for a China Garden. Now, you need to know that the East Side of St. Paul is generally the under-invested end of town, and to see the possibility of something as exotic as a China Garden at Phalen just seemed like an impossible dream. Understand that I knew nothing about China Gardens at that point. I just knew they could be amazing. Four years later, I encouraged our District 5 Payne Phalen Community Council to call a meeting about the possibility of a China Garden at Phalen Park as specified in the New Master Plan and met Linda Mealey-Lohmann, Mary Warpeha & Joyce Hsiao. They did a presentation for 30 community members including our state Representative, Tim Mahoney and his wife. The next year Tim and our State Senator Fongh Hawj submitted a Legacy Bill for the preliminary design of the St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden.

The last 5 years have been a blur: trips to Changsha, fundraising, community engagement meetings, many meetings with Parks & Recreation, Peanuts sculptures created and sent to Changsha, replica of the Aiwan Ting sent and to be reasssembled in Minnesota, ground breaking, dedications, successes and failures, and in the end, you can now experience certainly one of the most amazing single pieces of public art in the State of Minnesota, the Xiang Jiang Ting.

As we slog through this COVID morass, take a break to come out to Phalen Park to see the “Liu Ming Yuan”. It’s not hard to find. The entrance is right across from the Phalen Golf Club House parking lot. Bring your tea or lunch. Spend a few minutes. As we slop through this COVID morass, take a break to come out to Phalen Park to see the "Liu Ming Yuan". It’s not hard to find. The entrance is right across from the Phalen Golf Club House parking lot. Bring your tea or lunch. Spend a few minutes.

It started out as an engagement to build a garden and instead it has become an engagement to build a community. Join us in supporting the Saint Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden of "Whispering Willows and Flowing Waters"

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**Garden Updates & Opportunities:**

- **September 26-27:** Planting Dates
- **October 1:** Moon Viewing Event
- **October 11:** Phase 2 Side Dedication

Be part of the garden, we have volunteer opportunities, please contact us.

Make a donation: [http://mnchinagarden.org/donation](http://mnchinagarden.org/donation)

Individuals who make donations of $1,000 or more will have their name listed on the website and Garden Site Donor Wall as a "Groundbreaker."

**Garden Symbols on Xiang Jiang Pavilion**

- **葫芦宝顶 = Hulu Baoding Peak**
  - Represents 1-3-5 meaning “rising to the sky”. This peak looks like a hulu gourd used by the immortals and provides protection to the Pavilion and brings happiness.

- **Dragons**
  - Control water and rainfall; power and strength; good luck.

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**Garden Stories:**

"I find peace and comfort when I sit here, in the pavilion, on the quiet day. I enjoy a place that I am totally invested in it. The garden provides an opportuninty for my family to get involved." — Wang-Yu Vu (MCFGS Board Member)

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The Minnesota Chinese Friendship Garden Society—2020 Board of Directors

Bill Zajicek (President), Chen Zhou (Vice-President), Linda Mealey-Lohmann (Secretary), Ken Lau (Treasurer), N. Walter Graff, Barbara Harrison, Snowden Herr, Joyce C.Y. Yuan Hsiao, Romi Slowiak, Mary Warpeha, Joanie Xuejiao Zhang, Wang-Yu Vu

Please reach out to us:

Email: mcfgs@mnchinagarden.org
Website: [http://mnchinagarden.org](http://mnchinagarden.org)
Facebook: Friends of St. Paul-Changsha Friendship Garden at Phalen Park
Instagram: mcnchinafriendshipgarden

St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden at 1624 Phalen Drive, St. Paul (Phalen Park)