Ahhh, it’s that time again! Chinese New Year is my favorite holiday growing up. It’s when adults get together eating, drinking, and playing mahjong all night long. It’s when kids get to stay up really late, and receive numerous Hongbaos (free money in the red envelope). For me, it’s the equivalent of Thanksgiving, New Year and Christmas all rolled into one.

What does Chinese New Year mean for the China Friendship Garden? Count the ways: Let’s start by giving thanks. The last few years have been exciting, memorable, and totally awesome. Can you believe that dreams actually become reality? I’m still amazed that with everybody’s hard work - the board, the advisors, the artisans, the frontline workers, and all the donors (especially all the donors), we have made the impossible possible. Reflecting on the last 10 months has been dreadful with this pandemic, but we know that this too shall pass.

People ask me questions all the time. When are we planting the garden? What else are we building? What’s next? While I don’t have all of the answers, I know that whatever it is, it will be new and it will be exciting! Let’s make a Chinese New Year resolution together for our garden, we will do something new and awesome.

Last but not least, wishes. If I can have one wish from the Chinese New Year Santa, then I would wish for Hongbao for the garden. Mucho, mucho Hongbao. We know that’s the key ingredient to build a successful garden program.

Oh I should mention, this is the year of Ox. In ancient times, instead of Ox it’s called the water buffalo. National Geographic calls the water buffalo the living tractor of the East. Wink wink, I think that’s a sign. We could use a tractor to plow, to plant, to cultivate, and to fertilize in our garden. I’d like to end by wishing everyone a Happy Chinese New Year! We are thankful you are part of our family. Let’s make more amazing memories together.
Since 2005, volunteers have been the core of the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society. A volunteer is defined as someone who “freely offers to take part in something.” That’s me. Been there. Done that. Continue to do it with projects that make a difference.

Since childhood I have pulled weeds and planted flowers. Gardens have been on every piece of land I have called home. That is how this all started for me. Beginning in 1996 I savored friendships and volunteer life with many Chinese and Chinese Americans. It all began with a three month volunteer teaching experience in Changchun, Jilin. I spent my early mornings exercising with folks in the park – no shared language but shared feeling that there was something in the air that made us all feel blessed. I came home overflowing with the excitement of sharing life with teachers and students in this emerging society. Hamline University offered several programs in English as a Second Language through which I earned a certification in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, a second BA degree and ultimately a Master’s degree. Throughout the past 24 years, I have taught American language and culture to students of all ages here and in multiple cities in China.

Coming from a religious background of service, I was a natural to volunteer with US China Peoples Friendship Association – Minnesota Chapter as Board Member and President. It was during this time that I shared my passions with Linda Mealey-Lohmann, CC Hsiao, Joyce Hsiao, CJ Liu, Yang Wang, Margaret Wong, Walter Graff, Barbara Harrison, Chen Zhou, Weiming Lu, Bill Zajicek, Romi Slowiak and many others. Though we all had our own agendas and styles, we shared a mission of Friendship between our cultures. Out of these relationships, this core group went against the odds to develop a China Garden in St. Paul’s Phalen Regional Park. We had all been satisfied with our many friendships with people, but somehow there was a dream of a more public and enduring legacy.

Our dedication, unpaid hours, lack of support staff, uncountable personal connections, enormous and varied talents and sheer endurance blessed us with a gift exchange between St. Paul and our Sister City of Changsha, Hunan. We were diligent in connecting governments and parks. Perhaps the linch pin of this all was our relationship with Lei Yixin, Master Sculptor from Changsha who was invited to participate in a 6 week international sculpture event called MinnesotaRocks! We all stepped in offering interpreters, meals, outings, transportation, grocery shopping, home parties and Friendship to Lei and Rocky, his wife. Strong friendships were formed. Lei appreciated our volunteer nature and the rewards and benefits it offered to him and of course, to us as the givers. From this relationship came contact with Changsha and Yanghu Wetlands Park and the story continues through fund raising, partnership with the St. Paul Hmong Community, design decisions, Pavilion fabrication of the Xiang Jiang Pavilion in China, transport by ship, reconstruction, a Changsha work crew, delays and all the stories and tears and joys of many years by all of us who put our hearts into this project. So many stories for future newsletters.

Not only was I committed as a principle volunteer, I also committed our family money to make it happen. My husband, Walter, and I have been blessed with families who saw the value of service. We had generations of role models who gave as much as they were able to church and civil and health organizations. The Warpeha Davis Family met and agreed to make significant donations to this project. A project that will benefit us, the organizations of Friendship we support and the young and old of St. Paul and beyond who will treasure the St. Paul Changsha Garden of Whispering Willows and Flowing Waters for many generations. We feel so honored to have our Family associated with this beautiful cultural symbol made possible by volunteers committed to friendship and sharing of cultural beauty.

Hopefully, you and I will be able to dig the dirt as volunteers together in 2021. This China Garden is in its beginning phases. We continue to needs volunteers with passion to share and make dreams materialize. The benefits of volunteerism have changed my life and the lives of my family members. Come join us as we continue to enhance and beautify.
Each month we will feature some of our Groundbreakers.

Thank you for your support!

Donation Over $200,000: Ming Li Tchou & Dr. M.F. Memorial Fund

Donation $50,000-$99,999: Reginald Van & Annie Tsao Van

Donation $10,000-$24,999: Drach Hsiao Family Fund, Sping Lin, Karen Hsiao Ashe & James Ashe, Ben & Helen Liu, Weiming & Caroline Liu, Dr. & Mrs. Cziasarh Nengzong Yang, Chinese American Association of MN (CAAM), Legacy Dragon Festival, Lotus Charitable Funds

Donation $5,000-$9,999: Christina & Binh Le, Catherine L. Weyerhaeuser, US-China Peoples Friendship Association MN Chapter, 3M Foundation

Donation $1,000-$4,999: Walter Graff and Margaret Wong, Huizhong Guo, Katie Haghighi, Bill & Barbara Harrison, Jijun He & Ying Li, Ong Her, Jay & Leah Her, Vallen Koua Her, Fred & Jennie Hsiao, Carole Hyder, Robert & Patricia Jacobsen, Gangguo Ji & Xiuying Wu, Tao Jin & Yan Liu, Fangyu Kan & Yi Peng, Alfred Ku & Dr. Amy Yuan Ku, Drs. Aubrey Ku & Han Xiao, Dominic & Sharon Kwan, Kui-Chiu & Julie Kwok, Ming Lan & Frank Qie, George & Faith Latimer, Lau-Lee-Chiu Family Trust, Dr. & Mrs. Charles Lee, Juavah & Alizabeth Lee, Ko Lee, Pauline Lee, Txiag Xab Lee, Wen Li, Donglin Liang & Huaxing Wu, Huijie Lin & Hongwei Oyang, Sophie Liu-Othmer & Hans Othmer, Dr. Jay Jiekun Lou & Mrs. Wendy Lou, Tim Mahoney & Susan Bishop

Donation $200-$499: Mei Jiang & Chunyan Wang, Paul Kwok, Susan & Brad Lee, Dayuan Li & Lihong Bu, Guang Li, Dahai Lin, Fusheng Liu, Xiaoyan Luo, Mary McCormick, Peking Univ Alumni Assn-MN, Peter Rachleff, Barb & Joe Rosell

Garden Updates or Opportunities:

IMPORTANT DATES:

LUNAR NEW YEAR: February 12, 2021

WE NEED YOUR HELP — YOU CAN CHOOSE TO:

1. Contribute to completing and paying off expenses for PHASE I.
2. Then PHASE II can begin: the Hmong Plaza, Moon Gate with Donor Wall, Moon Bridge - contribute to this.

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

Make a donation: http://mnchinagarden.org/donation-options/

Individuals who make donations of $1,000 or more will have their name on the website and Garden Donor Wall as GROUNDBREAKERS!

In-Kind Donations: Design Services—Chengsha architects, Jennifer Junfang Fan and Jon Youhua, Wen of Huan Jianke Landscape Co., Ltd.

Thankson of hours of volunteer time by Board Members, Advisory Group Members, and community members

The Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society—2021 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 (Newsletter Editor)

Please reach out to us:

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Website: http://mnchinagarden.org
Facebook Pages: Minnesota China Friendship Garden | Friends of St. Paul-Changsha Friendship Garden at Phalen Park
Instagram: mchinafriendshipgarden