

CHINESE: All three schools have Chinese instruction

Continued from page 3

involved in the program. Tina Cao is teaching at Sisters Elementary School.

“The idea is to hit every student in the elementary school with Chinese,” Perkins explained. “The hope is that the students will have the exposure to Chinese culture and then want to go on in the middle school.”

Cao hails from Henan Province, the origin-point of Chinese civilization.

“It’s a very historical place,” she said. “Four thousand years ago, people lived there.”

She was drawn to teaching Chinese as an opportunity to experience a markedly different culture.

“I want to experience different life,” she said. “America is so different from China... Here life is peaceful, not so busy. The environment is so good — it makes people comfortable.”

All three teachers commented repeatedly on the blue skies and beautiful natural environment of Sisters Country.

Cao made note of another difference.

Teachers at Sisters Elementary School “encourage the students to create something or express themselves.” By contrast, students in China are usually reticent to speak up for fear of saying the wrong thing.

Yvonne Tieh will teach at

Sisters High School, where Vivian Zhang and Eva Xu are still in place, helping with making the transition between teachers.

Tieh, a fitness enthusiast, loves the natural beauty of Sisters.

“When jogging on the road, I met more deer than people,” she said.

Tieh was inspired to teach by meeting an American who was teaching English in China.

“The lady was so nice,” she said. “I thought it was very good to be a teacher teaching abroad. I wanted to be like her.”

She has taught previously in Thailand.

“I just love teaching Chinese to foreigners,” she said.

American students — at least in Sisters — are not quite what Tieh was anticipating.

“In my imagination, before I got here, I thought the students are naughty,” she said. “I think the students are very nice!”

Linda Yang, who teaches at Sisters Middle School, sees Sisters students as very different from students in China. Here, she says, there is more “learning by doing.”

Class sizes are much smaller than the 50 or 60 students who might be found in a class in China, where Yang spent five years teaching English to Chinese students before deciding to go abroad.

“American school is a little bit causal, (more) free than Chinese class,” said Yang, who is experiencing her first trip outside China. “I think the students are very



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Yvonne Tieh, Linda Yang and Tina Cao with David Perkins. The new teachers are helping to expand and strengthen Sisters’ Mandarin Chinese program.

active. I think the students are very outgoing. They say ‘hi’ to me. In China, the students are very shy.”

Because of the support of Hanban, a division of the Chinese Ministry of Information and the PSU Confucius Institute, there is very little cost to Sisters School District to host the teachers.

“The only thing the district pays for is their health insurance,” Perkins noted. “It’s a great deal for the school district.”

By integrating the Mandarin program through all three schools, the district is building a program with legs. And having full-time teachers in the high school means scheduling problems endemic in a small school have been smoothed out, enabling more students to take Chinese. And the turnout is impressive.

“We have 44 kids that signed up for Chinese I,” said Perkins. “It’s a bit overwhelming. It’s a record-breaker.”

The new teachers appreciate the welcome they have

found in Sisters, and are enjoying a way of living so different from their home.

“Very beautiful,” Yang reflected. “It’s very quiet. I like this town. The people are very nice.”

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