'Taste of Asia' comes to county fairgrounds

■ This year's Asian Celebration will feature a performance of Taek Gyeon, a Korean martial art, by Kyung-Hwa Jung

By Lindsay Buchele
Oregon Daily Emerald

A Korean national treasure will perform the dying art of Taek Gyeon at this year's Asian Celebration.

Also known as "Intangible Living Asset #76," Kyung-Hwa Jung has worked to keep Taek Gyeon alive and is being featured in the celebration, hosted by the Eugene-Springfield Asian Council.

"He started as a dedicated student and reached National Living Treasure status in the 1980s," said Tim Greathouse, who owns and operates Eugene HMD Academy, a Eugene martial arts school. "He's carrying on the past and the future by keeping this art alive."

Each year, celebration organizers pick a certain group or culture to be the focus of the celebration. This year's chosen culture is Korea, and the celebration will include a spotlight on a Korean dancing group from Tacoma, Wash., called "Morning Glory" and the performance of Jung.

For the past 16 years, the Eugene-Springfield Asian Council has been bringing an array of Asian entertainment, food, and culture to Eugene in the form of the Asian Celebration.

This year's celebration, "A Taste of Asia," will fill the Eugene Convention Center/Fairgrounds Saturday and Sunday with entertainment from every Asian culture.

"There's nothing like this celebration in the state," said Carrie Matsushita, the marketing and public relations manager for the city of Eugene. "It's non-stop entertainment for two days."

Brent Tokita, president of the Eugene-Springfield Asian Council, said the celebration combines performances and exhibits, including musicians, dancers, martial artists, an Asian market and an Asian food court.

"We draw in everyone with this celebration," Tokita said. "It includes all the different Asian groups."

Asian groups range from the Orient to the Middle East, Tokita said.

Tony Lum, co-chair of the celebration and the chairman of entertainment, said he tries to find an array of diverse groups that like to "show off."

"We devised this celebration so that the people involved are allowed to express their culture through art forms and food," Lum said.

Every one of the estimated 500 people who perform at the event is a volunteer, and is someone who understands his or her culture and roots, Lum said.

There will be two main stages this year, one designated as the main performance stage and the other for martial arts performances. One smaller stage will be located in the courtyard and will feature soloists and small craft demonstrations.

Many martial art forms will be seen on the separate martial arts stage at the Asian Celebration. Jung will also be performing on the main stage, even though his performance is technically a martial art.

Taek Gyeon is a martial art form that is thought to be the precursor to tae kwon do. Jung is the most recent in a line of three Grand Masters who have kept Taek Gyeon alive.

Greathouse visited Jung last summer and helped to bring him to Eugene for the celebration.

"When the Japanese occupied Korea in 1910, they attempted to eliminate all Korean culture, including the martial arts practiced there," Greathouse said. "Just a few Grand Masters continued teaching the martial arts underground."

The council has worked to keep politics out of the celebration, something Lum said is hard to do when martial arts are involved.

"Since there is such a long history of Asian countries fighting each other, we've asked for the martial arts demonstrations to be expressed more as an art form rather than combatant," Lum said.

That's why Jung's performance is so important to the celebration, Lum said.

"The Grand Master's performance is of the purest form," Lum said.

The Asian/Pacific American Student Union at the University is helping the American Red Cross bring in bone marrow transplant candidates at the celebration, is selling drinks to raise money, and has asked television anchors Christine Chang of local network KEZI and Nina Liu of local network KMTR to take part in a cooking demonstration.

Kim Nakayama, who does community outreach with APASU, said the Red Cross is looking for bone marrow from minority groups, particularly Asians, to meet the needs of those who need stem cell transplants.

"Bone marrow candidates need more Asian donors," Nakayama said. "Asians carry similar traits, including bone marrow, which makes it easier to make matches."

Cocaine

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come down. "It's not a good feeling when [the cocaine] wears off," Smith said, explaining that coming down from a cocaine high can be a physically painful, depressing process. "Your body is really heavy," she said. "It feels like cement is filling up your body. You can't pick yourself up. I think that's how people get addicted: They take more to feel better."

Smith also pointed out that the people she knows who use cocaine are not "typical" drug abusers. They are the children of people who find themselves at the high end of the income bracket.

"They were the athletes and the country club kids," she said. "The image goes along with the drug. It's high maintenance; models use it. Other drugs don't have that. Like, heroin is a dirty drug."

Sophomore journalism major Will Charters has tried cocaine several times. He explained that he tends to have strong opinions, and that he had just seen the movie "Traffic," which made him think more about the social issues surrounding cocaine.

"I have a twisted logic because I decided to try cocaine just because it was a drug I hadn't tried," he said. "But I think most people try it because of the image. When people think of heroin, they think of needles and stealing and people falling over and twitching on their backs. Someone on coke is not going to stare at a lava lamp. They won't be standing in a corner tripping out."

Instead, Charters said, "They will be talking and socializing with everybody else at the party."

Charters thinks that the drug ecstasy is a natural gateway to cocaine.

"The effects are similar," he said. "I think ecstasy is the most dangerous drug out there because people don't think it's dangerous. There were all these articles about it in Time and Newsweek that were not entirely negative. It got all this media attention; kids started doing it more. Why not try cocaine?

"It's like the media jumps on new designer drugs: 'What's the new thing that's killing our kids?' Cocaine has fallen out of media attention," he said.

But according to Charters, lack of media attention does not signify a decrease in drug use.

"Cocaine is still out there," he said.

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