

Chinese billionaire to donate money to restore mangroves

By Eric Staats
Naples Daily News

NAPLES, Fla. (AP) — Wenliang Wang has never seen the leafless dead mangroves that poke into the sky over a flooded mud flat between Goodland and Marco Island.

But the Chinese billionaire wants to restore them anyway.

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is counting on as much as \$5 million from Wang’s international conglomerate Rilin Industrial Group to restore the 225-acre black mangrove forest along San Marco Road and then apply the same fix to die-offs around the world.

Wang’s advisers, who recently visited the site, say it’s just what he does: “He has no motive other than the environment,” said Ted Venners, chairman of China Green, a Las Vegas-based company that brought the Rookery Bay project to Wang.

For project manager Robin Lewis, Wang’s involvement means the restoration is getting money that it has been lacking for years.

“It was like a blessing from heaven to have someone interested in our project,” said Lewis, president of Coastal Resources Group.

The die-off about a mile west of Goodland has been decades in the making, scientists say. The construction of San Marco Road, also known as State Road 92, in 1938 cut off tidal flow that feeds the mangroves from Fruit Farm Creek.



Mangroves depend on that flow to survive — Lewis calls it their heartbeat. When Hurricane Andrew came through in 1992, rains flooded the forest. By 1995, the die-off was apparent.

“Water can get in but it can’t get out,” Lewis said. “Left alone, this problem just gets worse and worse and worse.”

Lewis’ solution is simple. He plans to install new culverts under San Marco Road and, where needed, dig barely perceptible channels to help water get into the forest. Instead of water standing for months, drowning the mangroves, water will flow in and out.

“It’s just what the forest should be doing,” said Kevin Cuniff, a research

coordinator at Rookery Bay.

Frustrated by a lack of funding, Lewis undertook a first phase of the restoration with volunteers, donations, and a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Lewis showed off the results, a greening patch of formerly dead mangroves, to Wang’s advisers.

“It just shows what Mother Nature can do if given the opportunity,” Lewis said.

Still, there are doubts about the restoration project from those who say the only way to restore a dead mangrove forest is to replant it with seedlings. That method, which still is more common, also fails more than it succeeds.

Lewis calls his approach Ecological

MYSTERIOUS MOTIVE? The site of the Fruit Farm Creek Mangrove Restoration Project in the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is seen in Naples, Florida. International conglomerate Rilin Industrial Group is funding up to \$5 million to complete the restoration project. (Dorothy Edwards/Naples Daily News via AP)

Mangrove Restoration, or EMR, and it is the new spin and the fact that the project has all its permits and is ready to go that got the attention of Wang’s advisers.

Wang has undertaken similar projects before, raising similar questions about his motives. He has spent millions to protect one of the largest wetlands in China in Dandong, across the Yalu River from North Korea, and where Wang owns a strategic port. He also is working to stop deforestation of the Amazon in Brazil, where Wang trades soybeans.

In 2013, the secretive Wang made headlines when he pledged \$2 million to the Clinton Foundation, raising questions about his motives and about the foundation’s ties to foreign governments.

Last year, *The New York Times* reported that Wang — *Forbes* lists his net worth at \$1.05 billion and ranks him 288th on China’s richest list — was the money behind a shell corporation that bought three condos in the Time Warner building in New York City for \$25.6 million.

Rilin adviser Jack Shi’s phone rang as he walked along the side of San Marco Road looking at the dead mangroves and talking over the project.

“That was Wang,” Shi said.

Ancient Japanese crafts updated in exhibit

By Katherine Roth
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Traditional Japanese crafts like tea ceremony bowls, statuary, ornate lacquerware, and precious dolls are given an edgy, individualistic update in an exhibit currently on view at the Museum of Arts and Design.

Twelve masters of these ancient crafts — or *kogei* — take them in new directions, inspired by contemporary design, Japanese *manga*, anime, and other modern art forms.

“There is a technical ability inherent in kogei that has the capacity to unleash intense, future-oriented visual imagery,” curator Yuji Akimoto, director of Japan’s 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, says in the accompanying catalog.

The show, “Japanese Kogei: Future Forward,” was first shown at that museum in Kanazawa, Japan, and is open in New York through February 7.

The ancient crafts’ “own special, original richness and beauty ... give voice to the concerns of our time,” Akimoto says.

For instance, inspired in part by Japanese horror films, Kutsuyo Aoki’s ceramics combine rococo elements with spooky skeletal forms that “might perhaps be viewed as prayers or exorcisms, with the power to dispel the indefinable feelings of anxiety that proliferate in contemporary society,” Akimoto says.

Yuki Hayama’s painstakingly precise works in ceramic reflect a haunting blend of manga, dystopian vision, and ancient myth. The work is so detailed it requires ultra-high definition 8k technology — a screen image allowing for a resolution of about 33 million pixels, 16 times higher than current HD broadcasts — to fully appreciate.

Tea bowls in the show are boldly graphic, sometimes shown upside down (Yuri Takemura), in bright colors featuring contrasting drippy dots of color (Takuro Kuwata), or made with an eye to transcending physical and cultural boundaries by incorporating clays and techniques from around the world, as in works by Toshio Ohi.

Kohei Nakamura’s works in porcelain and iron reference science fiction or apocalyptic scenarios. And Kuwata’s enormous vessels feature chunky, glitzy glazes that appear to be breaking apart and descending from his vessels, with decorative elements resembling scraps of demolished buildings.

Beyond chess: Computer beats human in ancient Chinese game

By Malcolm Ritter
AP Science Writer

NEW YORK — A computer program has beaten a human champion at the ancient Chinese board game *Go*, marking a significant advance for development of artificial intelligence.

The program had taught itself how to win, and its developers say its learning strategy may someday let computers help solve real-world problems like making medical diagnoses and pursuing scientific research.

The program and its victory are described in a paper by the journal *Nature*.

Computers previously have

surpassed humans for other games, including chess, checkers, and backgammon. But among classic games, *Go* has long been viewed as the most challenging for artificial intelligence to master.

Go, which originated in China more than 2,500 years ago, involves two players who take turns putting markers on a checkerboard-like grid. The object is to surround more area on the board with the markers than one’s opponent, as well as capturing the opponent’s pieces by surrounding them.

While the rules are simple, playing it well is not. It’s “probably the most complex game ever devised by humans,” Dennis Hassabis of Google

Other artists take new approaches to the ancient crafts of figurative sculpture or *kutaniyaki* (a style of glazed pottery from the Edo period).

Two lacquer artists are also featured in the exhibit. Shin’ya Yamamura balances fine lacquer techniques with new forms using unusual materials, while Tatsuo Kitamura and his studio use newly rediscovered lacquer techniques and apply them to atypical forms, including ornate wooden eggs and Jewish and Christian religious items.

The exhibit, with wall texts in Japanese and English, features a brief biography of each artist and, in some cases, videos showing them at work.

Many of the artists lead aesthetic double lives, pursuing both traditional-style crafts and these more daring and controversial contemporary works.

Shinkyo Nakamura situates his work in a Japanese doll-making tradition that began in the 17th century. But he takes the craft in a new direction with highly stylized representations of Japanese courtiers in European costume, exploring the boundaries of traditional craft and contemporary sculpture.

“The strong sense of individualism found in these works link them equally to art as to traditional craft,” said Ronald T. Labaco, a curator at the Museum of Arts and Design who coordinated the New York show with Samantha De Tillo. “They extend the vitality of kogei into the 21st century.”

The exhibit is accompanied by a catalog written by Akimoto and published by the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art. The book, *Art Crafting Towards the Future*, is named for the original title of the exhibit.

DeepMind in London, one of the study authors, told reporters.

The new program, AlphaGo, defeated the European champion in all five games of a match in October, the *Nature* paper reported.

In March, AlphaGo will face legendary player Lee Sedol in Seoul, South Korea, for a \$1 million prize, Hassabis said.

Martin Mueller, a computing science professor at the University of Alberta in Canada who has worked on *Go* programs for 30 years, but didn’t participate in AlphaGo, said the new program “is really a big step up from everything else we’ve seen. ... It’s a very, very impressive piece of work.”

su | do | ku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

9			5		2	1		
	3	1						7
				1	7			
	9		7			4	3	
	8	3			9		5	
			2	5				
8						5	6	
		2	6		4			8

Difficulty level: Hard

#95213

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last week’s puzzle

Puzzle #64531 (Medium)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

8	9	7	6	2	3	4	5	1
2	3	6	1	4	5	7	8	9
4	5	1	7	9	8	6	2	3
9	2	4	3	5	7	1	6	8
6	8	3	4	1	9	5	7	2
1	7	5	8	6	2	3	9	4
3	6	8	9	7	4	2	1	5
7	4	2	5	8	1	9	3	6
5	1	9	2	3	6	8	4	7