

Traditional songs, dances usher in Chinese New Year



The traditional dance, according to Chinese custom, brings good luck and chases away evil. Here "teasers" poke the hungry lion. Afterward they will offer him a stick with greens on it. When he

plucks the greens, it brings good luck. Three students (James Sung of Farmington Hills, Evan Yeung of Plymouth and Hong Chou of Canton) take turns carrying the lion's head during the dance.

AMONG CHINESE-Americans yesterday, there were a lot of "Shen Yen Quee Let's" in the air. That's Chinese for "Happy New Year." On Tuesday night, the Year of the Rat ended.

On Wednesday morning, the year of the Ox began. Using the ancient Chinese lunar calendar, China is now in its 4,683rd year. According to Chinese lore, children born this year will grow up to be bright and cheerful.

Some 70 students at the Wayne County Chinese Language School helped usher in the new year Saturday night in Westland with traditional songs and dances. On stage during the celebration, held at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on North Dix, three students took turns donning a colorful lion's head and prancing about while looking for something to eat.

Also on stage, eight young girls reenacted the centuries-old ribbon dance. Both dances are traditionally performed at New Year's festivals, said Lucy Lee, program chairwoman.

"NO CELEBRATION would be complete without the lion's dance," Lee

said. "The dance is also performed at the opening of a new business, to help bring it good luck and to chase away evil."

The lion, alternately played by James Sung of Farmington Hills, Evan Yeung of Plymouth and Hong Chou of Canton, because the costume is heavy, pranced about, growled, slept and went hunting for food.

"Teasers," played by Marcella Lee of West Bloomfield and Cathy Yeung of Plymouth, poked the hungry lion and then offered him a stick with greens on it.

"When he plucks the greens, there is great joy because the plucking brings good luck," Lee said. "The pockets hanging from the red flag are filled with money and money is the reward for warding off evil spirits."

Legend has it that the graceful and beautiful ribbon dance began when an ancient emperor needed to escape from an assassin.

"So he ordered the ladies to dance so he could escape," Lee said.



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