

Chinese school officially opens

Updated 9 days ago

Brockville is embracing Chinese culture and language with the establishment of a Chinese school at the Ange-Gabriel Academy in Brockville.

The Chinese Mandarin language lessons are offered free of charge on Saturdays to children from junior kindergarten to Grade 8, and since they tend to pick languages up quicker than adults, they are loving it, the teachers say.

Following the success of the Chinese Summer Camp and what she sees as a growing interest of the Brockville population to expand their knowledge of different languages in a multicultural society, Ming Shan Gu, principal of the Eastern Ontario Wenbo Language School, has implemented the Chinese Mandarin Language and Culture Program. The school is affiliated with International Languages Program of the Ottawa French Catholic School Board.

The opening ceremonies were held Saturday after the program's second week of classes were finished. The celebration was hosted by Gu and her husband, Chuangwei Mu, who is the secretary, and attended by Ange-Gabriel Academy principal Patrick Lamon, Brockville Mayor David Henderson, French Catholic School Board representative Frank Da Costa, city immigration program co-ordinator Hasmik Minasyan, and the teachers, parents, students and the Chinese community supporting the program.

The opening remarks were delivered in French, English and Mandarin by three students, Tenisha Poelastra Sanger, Jacqueline McKend and Ivy Mu. The children have participated in songs, poems, stories, crafts, outdoor sports, history and geography.

"All the teachers are fluent in both English and Mandarin and hold Bachelors degrees, but it is not just about reading and writing," said Gu. "We make things interesting and attractive."

After the ceremonies, a luncheon was served in a buffet style of authentic Chinese food supplied by the Chinese community. It gave everybody a chance to mingle and enjoy the celebratory feast intended for family and friends.

"It is part of the Canadian mosaic to accept all cultures," said Da Costa, who helped set up the local program. "It is what makes us a great nation."

"For learning languages you need three things; good memory, good hearing and knowledge in music," Da Costa said. "Music tunes the ear to small nuances and changes to help with acquiring a new language."

Lamon is elated with the success of the program so far and the turnout at the opening ceremonies.

"It sends the message that we must expand our horizons and become open to different cultures," Lamon said. "Language is so important that it is nice to support the Chinese school. At our school, being that we are French in an English environment, we understand the need to learn new languages. Exchanging languages and cultures is important in avoiding isolation."

Henderson said the school gives the community an opportunity.

"I am so excited about the school and there being so many students interested in being a part of it," said the mayor. "It is great opportunity for them and for the entire community."

Almost all of the 60 students presently enrolled in the Chinese program do not speak Mandarin at home.

"They are all Canadians," said Beth Dai, a teacher at the school who also taught English in China for five years. "There is only one Chinese student who speaks Mandarin at home out of the group. Everyone starts from scratch. It is just thrilling to be able to teach parts of our Chinese culture to a younger generation. We

make it fun so that the students are keen to come even though it is on the weekend."

Her husband, John Becvar of Brockville, taught English in China for four years while studying Mandarin at Harbin Industrial University in China. He also spoke glowingly of the new Brockville school.

"The school is without a doubt a great investment in the future of Brockville being that it is a link between China and Leeds and Grenville," said Becvar. "This is a positive occurrence that could grow into something bigger as far as attracting, keeping and bringing people back into Brockville."

Gu grew up in China and was an English teacher there for 10 years. She has also started Mandarin language and culture educational programs in Merrickville and Smith Falls.

Jacqueline McKend, 8, participated in the camp this summer and is currently enrolled with the school.

"It is great, she loves it," said her mother, Cherin. "Jacqueline always wanted to learn Chinese. Now she's learning how to write her symbols, the Chinese zodiac, short phrases and all about the Chinese celebrations and foods."

There are after-class cultural programs which will include classes for both children and adults with heritage activities like Chinese painting, calligraphy, paper arts, mesh-flower making, cooking, badminton, ping pong and tai chi.

As the students follow the activity-based school curriculum to higher levels with the use of provided materials and technologies, the school hopes to supply them with a foundation for future learning so they can obtain credits in high school and continue studying Mandarin in university.

For more information, call Ming Shan Gu at 613-283-5044 or email e.owls2010@gmail.com.

Copyright © 2010 Brockville Recorder and Times