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Year of Boar enters with showmanship

JOSH SHAFFER, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Kevin Li performed his first Chinese lion's dance in the role reserved for novices -- the tail.

Now 21, he controls the fierce puppet's head, and he spent Saturday on stage dodging a teasing Buddha and chasing after a lucky head of cabbage.

"It was the first time we did the cabbage thing," he said, relaxing with his fellow puppeteers. "It's symbolic of money because it's green."

The traditional lion dance opened Saturday's Chinese New Year Festival, an eye-catching, taste-pleasing event in Raleigh that drew about 4,000 people.

Now in its 28th year, the celebration at the State Fairgrounds combined dances, songs, food and crafts to welcome the Year of the Boar -- or Year of the Pig as some call it -- which starts today.

"Boars are chivalrous and earnest -- very honest," said Cindy Yu-Robinson, president-elect of the Triangle Area Chinese American Society. "They don't have a lot of friends, but they make friends for life."

The seven-hour festival has grown from the original celebrations that lasted a third as long and drew only about 1,000 people.

Calligraphy demonstrations, rubber stamping, paper folding and Chinese knotting have all been added to make the celebration richer and more hands-on. An acupuncture information booth and Chinese yo-yo display also drew crowds, "so the public can really enjoy Chinese culture," Yu-Robinson said.

She estimated about 12,000 Asian-Americans live in the Triangle, with 6,000 of them of Chinese descent. As their numbers grow, Yu-Robinson said, the festival has become more pan-Asian.

Visitors sampled green tea, bubble tea, tea eggs, rice noodles, meat pottage and dragon-whisker candy -- thin strands of honey, peanuts and corn starch.



Members of the Raleigh Chinese Language School Dance Class No. 3 perform the 'Cloud Fairies Dance' from the Chinese opera based on the Monkey King legends. The celebration in Raleigh also included activities such as yo-yos and calligraphy.

Staff Photos by Chuck Liddy

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DURHAM FESTIVAL

Miss out on Saturday's festival? There's another in Durham today.

WHAT: Chinese New Year Celebration

WHEN: Noon to 4 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Nasher Museum of Art

ADMISSION: Suggested donation of \$5 for adults; free for Durham residents and children 16 and younger

DETAILS: www.nasher.duke.edu or 684-5135

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Laura Yen explained her method for hard-boiled tea eggs:

Boil two or three dozen eggs, crack the shells and cook them for three hours in a brew of water, soy sauce, black tea bags, salt and a spice whose name she couldn't quite remember. Then let them sit overnight.

"Usually, I cook it twice so the flavor will go in," she said.

Near the stage, Brenda Watson told the story of how she stumbled into her own pot of Chinese fortune.

Watson, 42, practiced tae kwon do avidly until she severed a tendon and had to stop. But every week, she passed by a kung fu studio in Cary while taking her sons to CiCi's Pizza. From inside, Master Jin Chen beckoned.

"One day I went in and never left," said Watson, finishing her broadsword performance. "I plan on doing this until I'm 90."

That's 48 more new year festivals, four of them boars.

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