

Coronavirus fears hurt ID businesses

Local reaction far outweighs actual illness

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

While some Chinese immigrants relentlessly raised money and collected supplies for those afflicted by the coronavirus outbreak, local businesses associated with Asia or Asian Americans faced a dire fall-off in business and even bankruptcy.

Fear of contagion has massively affected business in the Chinatown-International (ID). Usually crowded restaurants are seeing major decreases in clientele.

Chinese family associations that typically hold large Lunar New Year celebrations were canceling left and right.

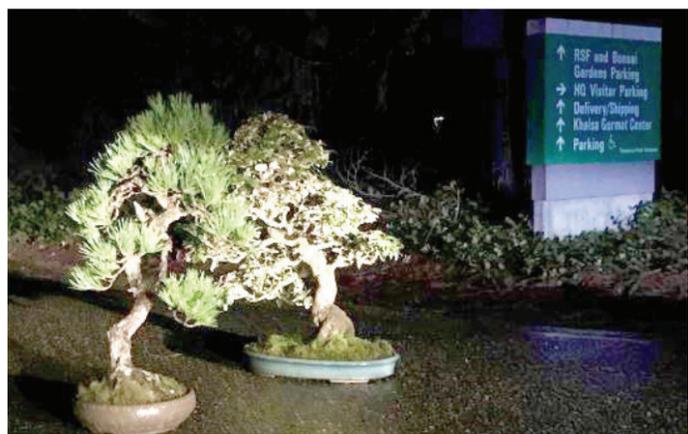
see **CORONAVIRUS** on 12



Attendance was not affected at the Asia Pacific Cultural Center Lunar New Year event on Feb. 8. Photo by Khemarintr Suwanchote.

Stolen bonsai returned

Thieves left the trees on the driveway



Returned bonsais on the driveway

By Staff
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

FEDERAL WAY, WA — Two bonsai, estimated to be worth thousands of dollars, were returned to the Pacific Bonsai Museum. The trees were stolen from the public display at the Federal Way museum on Feb. 9.

At approximately 11 p.m. on Feb. 11, security guards discovered the pair of bonsai sitting on the road leading to the museum.

Museum Curator Aarin

Packard has examined the trees and has declared them in fairly good shape.

“The Silverberry suffered some damage. It has some broken branches, probably due to improper transportation and handling, but both bonsai trees and their pots appear to be intact, which means they can return to being on public display.”

The Silverberry has been in training as a bonsai since 1946 and was created by a woman bonsai artist, Kiyoko Hatanaka,

see **BONSAI** on 3

Seattle Asian Art Museum's ribbon-cutting ceremony



Michael Shiosaki (left), State Rep. My-Linh Thai (4th from left), Rep. Pramila Jayapal (5th from left), and Seattle Art Museum Director Mimi Gardner Gates (6th from left) were at the Feb. 8 ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Photo provided by SAAM

Andrew Yang drops out of presidential race

By Staff
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY



Andrew Yang

Andrew Yang announced in an email to supporters on Feb. 11 that he is suspending his campaign for president.

“This is not an easy decision,” he said. “Endings are hard and I’ve always intended to stay in this race until the very end. But I have been convinced that the

message of this campaign will not be strengthened by my staying in this race any longer.”

Thousands of voters came out in support of the entrepreneur in the New Hampshire primary on Feb. 11, but it wasn’t enough.

“It is not the outcome we fought so hard for,” wrote Yang. “It is bitterly disappointing for many of us.”

see **YANG** on 11

Making Oscar history, ‘Parasite’ wins best picture

By JAKE COYLE

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In a milestone win that instantly expanded the Oscars’ horizons, Bong Joon Ho’s masterfully devious class satire “Parasite” became the first non-English language film to win best picture in the 92-year history of the Academy Awards.

“Parasite” took Hollywood’s top prize on Feb. 9, along with awards for best director, best international film and

see **PARASITE** on 15



Bong Joon Ho (right) reacts as he is presented with the award for best picture for “Parasite” from presenter Jane Fonda at the Oscars on Feb. 9. Looking on from left are Kang-Ho Song and Kwak Sin Ae.

AP Photo/Chris Pizzello

CORONAVIRUS from 1

The Soo Yuen Benevolent Association for Fong, Louie, and Kwong canceled its 500-person banquet planned for Feb. 10 at the Joy Palace Seafood Restaurant due to the virus.

The Gee How Oak Tin family association for Chin, Chen, Chan, Woo, and Yuen canceled its over 400-person banquet for April 26 at the House of Hong.

And the Chew Lun Family association for Hsu, Xu, Tse, Che, Kwan canceled its over-300 person banquet on March 14, also at the House of Hong.

Spokesman Henry Che said that 10 board members discussed the issue over the phone and made the decision to cancel the banquet because 40 Vancouver, B. C. Chew Lun members decided not to come.

At the same time, some organizers are still undecided if they should hold their annual Lunar New Year banquets this year, said House of Hong Owner Po Lee.

And it has not just been a loss for the restaurants. Other bookings related to the banquets, such as for DJs and lion dance performers, were also canceled.

Connie Au-Yeung of the Chinatown-International District Business Improvement Area said turnout was not as high as previous years at the annual Lunar New Year celebration in the ID on Feb. 8.

Still she said, “Event turnout was great, despite the news surrounding the virus... the weather and tunnel closure.”

The fall off in business is not unique to Seattle. At the Asia Pacific Cultural Center’s annual Lunar New Year celebration on Feb. 8 in Tacoma, Executive Director Lua Pritchard said, “We had fewer people but it wasn’t noticeable because it was still very crowded. Considering the health situation in China—our event was very successful!”

And the Feb. 1 Lunar New Year celebration at Bellevue Square saw an 8% increase in traffic, according to spokesperson Julie Hamasaki.

Back in the ID, travel agencies that cater to the China market are reeling. Felicity Wang, owner of Asian Pacific Tours and Travel in the ID, said, “If it lasts much longer,” she may not be able to stay in business.

Travel agents depend not only on fees from clients, but also on commissions granted by airlines, said Grace Chen of Holiday China, another travel agency in the ID. So when airlines canceled flights and offered refunds, agents lost their commissions, she said.

“The airlines didn’t think about this,” she said.

Neither United Airlines nor American Airlines responded to requests for comments.

Chen said many of her customers were reluctant to pay fees for agents to handle cancellations of their trips or to arrange flights out of China.

“But if we don’t charge anything, how can we survive?” she said.

Several other travel agencies focused on travel to China didn’t even answer phones after repeated calls.

Fundraising and collecting supplies

Hundreds of Chinese immigrants in Seattle raised over \$200,000 for medical supplies for China, as well as collecting surplus supplies from distributors in the Seattle area to help cope with the coronavirus outbreak.

The alumni association that has organized the efforts hails from one of China’s top universities, which is in Wuhan, at the center of the outbreak.

The Huazhong University of Science



Volunteers from multiple groups join at the airport with flight personnel before shipping a first load of medical supplies to China (Photo courtesy of HUST Alumni Association)

and Technology (HUST) Alumni Association of Seattle, mostly made up of engineers, tech workers, and software developers, has joined with half a dozen other groups in a series of relief efforts that started on Jan. 28 and continue as of press time. Their actions came as many immigrants from China are gripped by an overwhelming fear for the future of their country.

“You see the people are suffering, and you want to help,” said Qiong Chen, a leader of the relief efforts.

“We just do a little, and what we can do, we do,” she said. “We can’t let our feelings of sadness overwhelm us.”

Still, when the HUST Alumni Association began their relief campaign, they were met with failure.

Face masks, which are required to be worn in some cities in China, are in short supply there, according to news reports and interviews with travelers returning from multiple cities in China.

Volunteers from the myriad of groups that banded together spent days and nights scouring distributors around Seattle and online trying to find face masks to ship to China. The face masks are so valued that they were the preferred Chinese New Year gift last month, rather than the traditional red envelopes with money, according to one traveler.

Finally, one of the group’s volunteers located some several hours outside of Seattle. The volunteers were overjoyed.

“Heaven will not disappoint the person who tries hard,” wrote Chen on WeChat, a Chinese social media platform.

Over the following week, the volunteers collected 43 crates of medical supplies needed in Hubei Province, where the outbreak is worst. These included more face masks, including 6,000 contributed by Chinese students at the University of Washington (UW), protective medical gear, booties, goggles, and gloves.

Chen also stressed that volunteers specifically stayed away from retail stores so as not to exhaust supplies available to the general public and only approached distributors. At the same time, they asked distributors to offer only what they had on hand so as not to affect the availability to others. Finally, they steered clear of any individuals that hoarded medical supplies to sell at a higher rate.

Volunteers formed caravans to ferry the large crates in their own cars to the airport. All transportation, including handling and flights by Hainan Airlines and by companies in China, were also donated, said Chen.

“We have not spent a penny on transportation,” she said.

Funds raised by the group have been used to purchase CPAP machines, to help the most afflicted patients breathe, and other medical equipment in China. Companies such as Microsoft, which donated by far the most at \$20,600, matched the funds donated by individuals. The total raised from company donations exceeded \$100,000.

“People said they were moved by our mission, our efficiency and transparency, and they kept donating to us,” Chen said.



Volunteers prepare to load medical supplies (Photo courtesy of HUST Alumni Association).

An outbreak of fear

People returning to the United States from China carried memories of panic they had witnessed. They described supermarkets emptied out first thing in the morning. They said that people who were unable to obtain face masks, either because they were sold out or because they could not afford them, were shunned by others.

One Chinese American woman said she held her breath every time she lifted her face mask to drink water through a straw, on her flight back from Beijing to Taipei then Seattle.

“There was still so much uncertainty about how it spread,” said Fiona Dawn, a songwriter and DJ based in Beijing.

Upon returning to Seattle, people without symptoms were given leaflets at the airport from the CDC suggesting they quarantine themselves at home for two weeks.

But in some cases, others living in the same apartment building worried that central heating could spread the virus, according to a health worker in the Chinatown-International District (ID). Health authorities, however, said this was not possible.

“There has never been a documented case of coronavirus spreading this way,” said Meredith Li-Vollmer, Risk Communication Specialist at Public Health – Seattle and King County.

“It is not an airborne virus,” she told the Northwest Asian Weekly.

King County’s response

A Feb. 7 news conference, held at Asian Counseling & Referral Services, was prompted by recent cases of stigma and discrimination based on race and national origin. It was led by King County Executive Dow Constantine, health authorities, and community leaders.

To help prevent discrimination, Public Health – Seattle & King County released a poster and related materials that said, “Viruses don’t discriminate, and neither should we.”

Matias Valenzuela, director of the Office of Equity and Social Justice at King County, said there had been over 100 incidents of hostilities.

One man speaking at the news conference said his 5-year-old son had been asked to leave a Costco in Issaquah because he was wearing a face mask. He said he confronted store authorities about it and the CEO and the general manager personally apologized to him.

Lalita Uppala, chair of the King County Immigrant and Refugee Commission, said Asians often wore masks even when they weren’t sick, for cultural purposes. Valenzuela and others urged anyone encountering hostilities to report it to authorities.

“Discrimination is against the law,” he said.

At the same time, some said extra precaution was sometimes necessary.

Tony Au of the International Lion Dance & Martial Arts Team said his troupe recently performed at the Kin On nursing home.

He noted that the performers’ temperatures were checked and asked if they had been to China recently. They were asked to wear face masks before performing for the seniors. But he praised Kin On for its planning to protect its seniors from getting sick.

“They asked us if we didn’t mind wearing masks,” he said.

“Also, we needed to sign a form stating that we were not in China during the past weeks. They asked us not to use lettuce for the dance as it might spread germs, and not to get too close to their clients,” he said.

“I liked their thoughtful approach,” he added.

Public health authorities are also recommending vigilance.

Dr. Jeff Duchin, Health Officer, Public Health – Seattle and King County, said that the “tried and true” methods for combating any contagious illness are the best.

“Don’t go to work or school if you’re sick, this is the same advice we give to people every influenza season,” he said. People should cover their mouths if they have a cough, he said, and everyone should wash their hands frequently, and should not touch their nose, face, mouth, or eyes unless they wash their hands first.

While he said “the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) is saying this will be the next pandemic,” there is no outbreak here.

“The people at the greatest risk are those who have traveled to China in the past 14 days or have been exposed to someone who is known to have the virus.” He emphasized there is still only one case in our area. But he expected there would be more before the outbreak ends. He also told people there was no need to wear masks in public.

“We’re not recommending people wear masks in public because there is no novel coronavirus outbreak [here] and they’re not effective in preventing its spread,” said Duchin. ■

To get complete and updated information on the novel coronavirus, how to stay healthy, and what to do if you get sick, go to kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus.aspx or call 1-800-525-0127 and press #.

To report a case of hostility, discrimination, or aggression against you if you are targeted as a result of your ethnicity, go to kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus/anti-stigma.aspx.

To donate to relief efforts by the HUST Alumni Association, go to sites.google.com/view/hustaa-sea/fighting-2019-ncov.

Mahlon can be reached at info@nwasianweekly.com.

Lake View Cemetery

Seattle’s Pioneer Cemetery

Est. 1872

An Independent, Non-Profit Association



Featuring

Traditional Side-by-Side Monument Properties

206-322-1582

1554 15th Ave East (North Capitol Hill)