

# Reviving Chinatown

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By [Yvette Mancilla](#) | March 03, 2014 | [Arts & Entertainment](#), [Multimedia](#), [Video](#)

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*Chinese New Year Parade reminds many of the efforts needed to renew Chinatown*



**Photos by Katie Eleneke / The Collegian**

Two red lion dancers perform down Kern street in the heart of Chinatown, during the 14th annual Fresno Chinese New Year parade on Saturday.

Fresno's Chinatown celebrated the 2014 Year of the Horse with the 14th annual Fresno Chinese New Year Parade on Saturday.

Fresno State President Joseph Castro was present for the festivities, acting as grand marshal for the parade, and thanked community members, faculty and students for all the support during the celebration.

The event was made possible by the Chinatown Revitalization organization, a nonprofit dedicated to restoring Fresno Chinatown and preserving its history through community development, increasing public attraction and improving the area's appearance.

Kathy Omachi, a board member of the organization said most people now are unaware of the historic diversity the neighborhood once held.

“Think of the word diversity, people think it's a new word but it's not,” Omachi said. “This is an area that was an original home for Armenians, African-Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Portuguese, Mexican-Americans, Greek, Germans and Filipino communities. All called Chinatown home and then they dispersed out from the area.”

Because of poor economic times and other factors, Omachi said very few are aware of Chinatown and don't venture to the area in Downtown Fresno. This was one of the reasons the new year parade was started up again 14 years ago by the committee. The first parade consisted of around four entries, and only 50 people showed up to the watch the two-block procession, Omachi said.

“We take pride on this [the parade],” Omachi said. “We have very few sponsors, but it's important to us to show people it's safe to visit here more often. We just kept at it, rain or shine.”

Steve Lee, a Fresno State alumnus and now president of Hua Zang Si Fresno mission, a local Buddhist temple. Lee said that the parade was a great outlet for different people in Fresno to come learn more about the Chinese presence in Fresno.

“There are not a lot of Chinese here, and I think students and more should learn more about Chinese culture,” Lee said.

He added that the youth and local college students are unaware of the culture, and the Fresno mission would be happy to collaborate with Asian-oriented clubs on campus.

“Most of the kids don't know [about the culture] and don't know how to speak Chinese,” Lee said. “We try to promote that, too, so they can speak Chinese, and the mission would be interested in doing collaborations with Fresno State clubs.”

Fresno State student Richard Yang volunteered his time to the Fresno chapter of the Food Recovery Network during the parade. Yang said he was ready to eat different foods at the parade provided by the diverse cultures present, but was taken aback by how many different groups there were.

“I was looking forward to the food and to see what other races were on hand to celebrate,” Yang said. “But I was actually surprised to what other cultures are here, and I saw the Scottish group and I was like, ‘Am I at the right place?’ “

Some of the groups present were the Scottish Society of Central California, Tzu Chi Fresno and Fresno Fire Department.

Castro said the Chinese New Year Parade was an important occasion for the various communities in the Central Valley to learn more about Fresno State through the student volunteers who were present.

“I love that our students and faculty have volunteered to serve today,” Castro said. “In their own way, they’re role models for Fresno State. Young kids can see what’s possible through them.”

“It’s a great opportunity for different communities in Fresno and throughout the Valley to know about Fresno State,” Castro said. “It’s especially important for the parents and their children to know that if they want to get a higher education that Fresno State will be there for them.”



Fresno State President Joseph Castro thanks the Chinese New Year Parade volunteers and organizers for their efforts in the community.

Castro also said that he knows how much of the student population at Fresno State complete volunteer and internship hours, but encouraged students to reach more in the underserved Downtown area.

“Students are already volunteering a number of hours every year, and I encourage as many of them to serve throughout the community, especially in Downtown,” Castro said. “I think it’s a great thing that they’ll get more out of it in the experience than however many hours they will put in.”

Omachi said that despite hard times, through the efforts of volunteers and multiple organizations that join the Chinatown Revitalization, the New Year Parade will continue on.

“Just like those 11 communities that were here, you just hang in until you’re successful,” Omachi said. “There is a definite possibility of the 15th parade next year. We plan to keep going for while. We’ve gone through the zodiac once, and we’ll go through it again.”