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LOCAL NEWS

BERGEN COUNTY

# Pan-Asian harvest festival held in Fort Lee

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The Record

Sunday, September 23, 2007

By **JIM BECKERMAN**  
STAFF WRITER

The guest of honor made her appearance at Saturday's Mid-Autumn Moon Festival in Fort Lee about 6:50 p.m.

Bergen County

The moon, lighting up the sky after an unpromising, cloudy afternoon, was a happy sight to the many hundreds who showed up to this pan-Asian harvest festival.

Essex County

Not everybody was impressed, though.

"I see the moon every night," said Kaishin Lin, 10, of Teaneck.

She was more taken by the acrobatics, dancing, music, food and theatrics that were part of the outdoor Fort Lee event, a celebration of abundance and togetherness with 3,000-year-old roots.

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Some 250 paper lanterns, traditional symbol of the Moon Festival, dotted the perimeter of the Fort Lee Community Center.

Visitors carried many more of the paper lamps as they made their way among booths selling spring rolls, steam dumplings and the traditional festival "moon cake" -- adzuki beans, sea salt, sugar, flour.

Lions of red, white, green and gold glitter prowled the stage, each peopled by two kids from the Bergen Chinese School in Hackensack.

"This is really one of the major holidays in Asia," said Suzan Cho of Bergenfield, vice chairwoman for Chinese Service Center USA in Paramus, which organized the festival.

"The full moon, being round, always signifies unity and togetherness," Cho said.

The CSC, now 35 years old, runs three Chinese-language schools -- two in Hackensack, including Bergen Chinese School -- and a summer camp. But the group's 11 trustees also wanted to build a bridge to other Asian communities in Bergen County, and to the larger, non-Asian public. Hence the festival -- the first of its kind for CSC, and for Bergen County.

"We really had to do something to reach out, to introduce the Asian culture to this community, and share all the wonderful talents of the people here," said Bao-Wen Yang of Closter, chairman of CSC.

The Chinese calendar, which also determines the New Year, is the basis for the Moon Festival, said to date back to the Zhou dynasty (1066 – 221 BCE).

Chang'e, the Pandora-like woman who overdosed on a pill of immortality and floated to the moon, is the mythological basis for the holiday. According to a legend with many variants, her archer-husband Houyi -- identified with the sun -- chased her to the moon, and they meet up every autumn. Hence, the extra-bright harvest moon.

"There are so many stories behind the Asian festivities," Cho said. "The best way to teach the history is through the storytelling."

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The holiday, second only to New Year on the Chinese calendar, was always great fun for kids, recalls CSC trustee Sharon Ma of Paramus.

"The children would take the lanterns, and take the moon cake and eat it outdoors, under the moon," said Ma, who grew up in Hong Kong. "We would play outside all night, and my parents would play mah-jongg until morning."

Saturday's event actually preceded the full moon by five days. The three-quarter moon, while nice, was not ideal for the festival, said CSC member Kirby Tan of Upper Saddle River.

"It's not perfect," Tan quipped. "We have to computer-edit it."

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