

PALO ALTO WEEKLY

PaloAltoOnline.com

Living Well

A Resource Guide for Adults 50+

2024

COMMUNITY | WELLNESS | HOME

Getting Around · Fitness · Health · Homecare · Housing



SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF ATHERTON, EAST PALO ALTO, LOS ALTOS, LOS ALTOS HILLS,
MENLO PARK, MOUNTAIN VIEW, PALO ALTO, PORTOLA VALLEY AND WOODSIDE



Above: Attendees watch and record a dance performance at the Lunar New Year celebration hosted by Avenidas Chinese Community Center at Cubberley Community Center in Palo Alto in January. Right: People dance to "Gong Xi Gong Xi", which translated to "Congratulations, Congratulations", at the Lunar New Year celebration.

Center's celebration of Chinese culture fosters diversity, sense of belonging

Avenidas builds connections through bilingual classes, group activities

STORY BY CHRIS KENRICK · PHOTOS BY MAGALI GAUTHIER

On any given day, Avenidas Chinese Community Center in Palo Alto is abuzz with older adults learning how to speak Mandarin, trying their hand at Chinese paint brushing, practicing tai chi or enjoying Lunar New Year festivities.

The center, which celebrates Chinese traditions and culture, has become a go-to destination for a growing number of seniors throughout the community.

Many participants are Chinese immigrants who speak little English; others are Chinese Americans wishing to explore their roots; and some just have an interest in Chinese language and culture.

Palo Alto resident Joan Beit-Zuri is among those who frequently use the center. She said she feels "very included" there even though she is

not Chinese and does not speak Mandarin or Cantonese.

Beit-Zuri discovered the community center while looking for a class in Chinese brush painting. Now, she's hooked on learning more about Chinese culture.

She not only takes the painting class, but she's enrolled in an "Everyday Cantonese" course, as well as a baduanjin exercise class at the center.

Providing a space for the area's aging Asian population to connect with others who share a similar heritage was one reason that Avenidas



launched the center in 2018. In Palo Alto, 15% of the aging population currently identifies as Asian, and in neighboring Mountain View, Asians represent over 20% of the senior population, according to data from Avenidas.

That was not the only reason, however, the nonprofit opened the center: Bringing together people of different backgrounds was a high priority, Tracy McCloud, Avenidas director of programs, said.

The center hired Hong Kong-born Pinki Fung, who is fluent in English, Mandarin and Cantonese, to make sure bilingualism was integrated into all aspects of the center.

"It was 100% by design that all activities are offered in English and Mandarin," McCloud said. "The idea is to expose people to each other so they understand each other and get along better."

Before the center opened, Fung organized focus groups in both Mandarin and English to learn what would draw seniors to a Chinese cultural program.

"People said they wanted tai chi, health and wellness, but that language was the most important thing," Fung said.

A tai chi class came first, followed by singing and karaoke. Later, a group of seniors asked Fung to add conversational Cantonese so they could bargain while shopping in San Francisco's Chinatown. Fung recruited longtime community volunteer Ingrid Lai to teach the class, which has since become a popular offering at the center.

"We want people to mingle, have fun, make some more friends and not feel any barriers because of the language or culture or anything," Fung said.

Currently, more than 900 people receive the center's monthly newsletter, and more than 250 seniors are typically enrolled in classes at the center. Fung said about a quarter of the center's current participants are Chinese-speaking with limited English.

In interviews translated by Fung, several of those who use the community center said the programs have boosted their mental and

physical health, especially the online classes that were offered during the pandemic.

"The scariest thing for elderly is being home alone," said 81-year-old Ruby Liu of Palo Alto. "This helps us reduce chances of getting depressed. I feel I am a happy senior, and even my kids are happy with no worry about me."

For Kim Rogers, a retired engineer from Sunnyvale, the center has helped her reconnect with her Chinese roots. Born in Hong Kong, Rogers was adopted by an American family and spent her childhood in the Midwest where, she said, there was no opportunity to learn about Chinese history and culture.

Rogers said she appreciates the inclusiveness and tech-friendliness of the program. As an Asian who could not understand the Chinese language, Rogers said, "I often felt like I didn't quite belong."

She soon realized she had much in common with other Chinese Americans who had never learned to speak Chinese.

"Their parents might have spoken it, but growing up in the U.S., they didn't, so they also felt that same feeling of not quite belonging," she said.

Additionally, Rogers said, "Pinki holds in-person events around every Chinese holiday, and they have made me feel so included."

Palo Alto resident Ellen Wallace, a student in the "Chinese Culture in America" class taught by retired engineering manager Andrew Chang, said Chang's bilingual approach is "seamless."

"He's either showing slides in Chinese and speaking in English, or vice-versa," Wallace said. "It just works."

Wallace, who said she's been studying Mandarin for years, though is not fluent, has continued in Chang's class for at least two years.

"I see several non-Chinese faces on Zoom in the class who are obviously enjoying it as much as I am — and learning a lot in a very entertaining fashion," she said. **LW**

For more information about the Chinese Community Center at Cubberley Community Center, go to avenidas.org/programs.

AVENIDAS PROGRAMS HELP YOU RE-CONNECT



Avenidas Village

A community of support for aging in place

Pre-Screened Vendors • Transportation Assistance
Members-Only Website • Handyman & Tech Support
Social Events & Interest Groups
Network for Resource Sharing



Avenidas Learning & Leisure

Offering opportunities for personal development

Art, Drama, Writing • Wine Appreciation
Current Events & Lectures • Games & Clubs
Medicare, Legal, & Tax Counseling Services
Offerings In-Person & Online



Avenidas Care Partners

Guiding people through life's transitions

Elder Care Consultations • Care Management
Individual & Family Counseling • Family Caregiver
Support Groups • Information & Referral Services
Community Presentations



Avenidas Rose Kleiner Center

Caring for participants in a safe, nurturing day program

Daily Nursing & Health Monitoring • Music & Art
Group Exercise • Social Work Services & Caregiver Support
OT, PT, & Speech Therapy Services • Nutritious Lunches
Holiday Celebrations • Transportation



Avenidas Health & Wellness

Keeping adults active & informed

Fitness Classes • Health Lectures & Screenings
Therapeutic Nail Care • Meditation & Yoga
Tai Chi & Feldenkrais • Massage & Reiki
Medical Equipment Loan Closet

CONNECT AND RE-DISCOVER YOURSELF



Avenidas Chinese Community Center

Exploring cultures, customs, and community building
Activities in both English and Mandarin • Cultural celebrations
Avenidas華人社區中心
探索文化，習俗及建立共融社區
普通話及英文雙語活動 • 傳統文化節慶慶祝



Avenidas Volunteer Corps

Sharing your time and talents
Tutor Kids • Help with Events & Projects
Provide Rides • Outreach Calls & Visits
Lead a Class or Activity



Avenidas Door to Door

Keeping seniors connected
Rides for Medical or Social Needs
Deliveries • Friendly Calls & Visits



Avenidas Rainbow Collective

Delivering resources and services needed
by LGBTQ Seniors
Socialization • Case Management • Health & Wellness
Cultural Competency Workshops • Information & Assistance
Caregiving Support & Resources



Avenidas Technology PLUS

Helping seniors navigate the changing world of tech
Tech Workshops on Hot Topics
One-on-One Tech Tutoring
Licensed Senior Planet from AARP Classes
Offerings In-Person & Online • Class Scholarships Available