Who We Are and What We Do

The Westchester-Hudson Valley chapter of OCA is one of the leading social advocacy and cultural organizations in the county. Our talented and committed membership sponsors a full calendar of events and projects, all of which celebrate the growing presence of Asian Americans in the Hudson Valley area and raise awareness of our needs and concerns. A description of our mission and an outline of our most important activities follow below.

Social Advocacy
Our core mission is social advocacy on behalf of all Asian Americans, local and nationwide. To that end, our chapter maintains a strong relationship with local community action and human rights groups where we are able to voice the concerns of our constituency in hot-button issues such as the Private Danny Chen case, the recent influx of new Asian immigrants and rising health care needs for Asian seniors. We are at the forefront of activities requiring political action such as immigration reform and human rights. And we work continuously towards the goal of placing talented Asian Americans in appointed positions and political office.

We are proud that two of our Board members play prominent roles in County affairs: Mark Fang is the current County Commissioner of Human Rights and William Kaung has a long history of leadership in important community coalitions, serving on boards and executive committees in organizations such as "We Are Westchester" and the "Hudson Valley Community Coalition" (HVCC).

The Asian American Heritage Festival
This is our chapter's most longstanding and successful event. The Asian American Heritage Festival is held each May at Kensico Dam in Valhalla, NY to coincide with Asian History month in America. This is an all-day family-friendly event designed to introduce local residents to Westchester's multifaceted and talented Asian community. We provide hands-on activities for children and all-day entertainment featuring experts in traditional Asian dance and song and masters of the martial arts, including lion dancers. These professional artists share the stage with children's dance troupes in colorful costumes and talented youngsters from local language schools.

The festival is also a showcase for local small businesses and non-profits, featuring vendors selling Asian-themed cultural artifacts and handmade goods, agencies offering educational and health services and restaurants cooking up a wide array of Asian foods, South Indian to Cantonese, for the hungry public. This festival attracts as many as 7,000 residents to the Dam each year. Admission is free.

The Rising Stars Concert
This event showcases the considerable musical talents of local young Asian Americans to the community-at-large. Musicians from the ages of 7 to 18 compete for a place on the program via audition by a panel of professional musicians and teachers. Those selected perform a variety of musical selections, western classical to traditional Asian, on instruments ranging from piano to the yangqin. This year, two concerts were held, one at Steinway Hall and another at the Chappaqua Library Auditorium.

The Dynamic Achiever Awards Gala
This annual event highlights the achievements of particularly gifted Asian Americans in the New York area in the fields of business, government, science/medicine/technology, education and the arts. This is our chapter's most beloved event, a valentine to the Asian community, by honoring our best and brightest. Past winners include filmmaker Ang Lee, AIDS researcher Dr David Ho, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Sheryl WuDunn, journalist Julie Chen, designer Zang Toi and many more.

The Student Leadership Program
Each year, gifted Asian high school students compete for this highly coveted award which offers monetary scholarships and community recognition. The criteria is rigorous and the candidates are uniformly outstanding. Three student winners are chosen by a team of judges and honored at a special ceremony at the Dynamic Achievers Award Gala.

The Westchester Chinese New Year Festival
Our chapter provides substantial hands-on help every year to the largest Chinese New Year cultural celebration in the Hudson Valley. This event, featuring Chinese New Year-themed crafts, vendors and stage performers, taps the talents of many community groups and draws 700 celebrants each year.

Meet the Candidates Forum
Our chapter of OCA-WHV joins with Pace University every fall to bring candidates running for local office face-to-face with their Asian American constituents. This event is an important piece of OCA's mission to promote social advocacy and to engage Asians more fully in the political process.
Dialogue with the President

In March, 2013, Rose Tan Kaung, immediate past president of OCA and Newsletter co-editor, sat down with current President Vincent Young, to ask questions about his goals and aspirations for our chapter. Here is a peek at what transpires when two presidents start talking:

RTK: Vincent, how did you get involved with our chapter?

VY: It goes back more than 30 years. I was actually at the first meeting, called by a gentleman named Mark Lee who had a gift of bringing people together. I went because it was a first for Chinese Americans living in Westchester County. We met at Frances Chu’s home and it was a very fruitful meeting because people were very motivated to establish a Chinese organization in Westchester. That was my first introduction to OCA.

RTK: When was that?

VY: 1980. Frances put together a founding group: Howie Chang, Fred Tang, Suzette Low and Franklin Chin. Each of them became president of the chapter in successive years. I was active as a member, but in 1990 then-president Jean Chang asked me to run for vice-president. Jean was a driving force. After she served two terms, I became president in 1992. At that time, I had young children at home and a demanding job and the organization itself was not as expansive as it is today. We had a board meeting every two months and a board of 10 to 15 people. We had one New Year’s party and one dinner during the course of the year.

RTK: You’re retired now—what made you accept the presidency once again and at this time of your life?

VY: It’s a no-lose situation. I knew that I would be surrounded by good people who have been president themselves and who continue to serve as board members, such as Xiaochun Luo, Meow Yee, yourself and Mr. OCA himself, your husband Bill Kaung, and past presidents in the area who are still very active—Jean Chang and Jeannette Wang.

RTK: What do you enjoy most about leading this chapter?

VY: Working with all the members. They are so educated and talented. We have PhDs, doctors, nurses, business owners, and corporate executives. People of ability in so many fields, and we have a nice mix in term of age—all of them dedicated to our cause.

RTK: It’s true. Bill and I enjoy working with all the members and have developed life-long friendships through OCA-WHV. But tell me, what are the challenges you face?

VY: The Danny Chen case occurred in my tenure, and since Danny was a New York City resident, our chapter had a special duty to help raise national awareness. (See article in this issue). Fortunately, we have not encountered a major issue with the scope of Danny’s case affecting the Asian community in Westchester. I believe that is attributable to OCA’s influence. We and I would hope all Asians are known and respected in the community. Whenever there is an issue with the Asian community, local TV Channel 12 has OCA on speed-dial.

RTK: What do you hope to achieve during this year?

VY: I want to reach out to a wider audience, especially to the five or six Chinese language schools in Westchester and other Asian organizations. They offer programs that support ours. The Asian Heritage Festival at Kensico Dam, the student leadership awards, the Rising Stars, the Gala—all draw from the talent and energy of the local families involved in the language schools. Their students are our future. They join Young OCA and eventually become an integral part of our organization.

RTK: What are your fundraising and outreach challenges?

VY: People are under stress for time and money. We need to be more inventive and innovative. Corporations offer grants such as Con Edison’s “Green Program.” We need to build outreach programs that match the criteria of these grants. I consider my role to be a facilitator, to help members step-up to be leaders—like Lawrence Ng, who at a moment’s notice took over Rising Stars and did a great job. Ours is a talented group. I want to enable them.
“I never read this in my U.S. history book,” exclaimed the gentleman in the fourth row halfway through Bill Kaung’s account of the lynching of Chinese railroad workers by rival laborers in the late 1800s.

The hardships endured by immigrants from South China who built America’s transcontinental railroad are familiar fare to Chinese Americans now. But they still come as a surprise to most Americans, including the more than 100 members of The Old Guard, Westchester’s premier association of retired male professionals, who gathered in White Plains on March 6 for a spirited lesson on the history of Chinese in America by Bill Kaung, OCA-WHV’s resident activist/historian. The subject of Bill’s hour-long presentation was the Chinese Exclusion Acts, the notorious series of discriminatory laws passed by Congress which barred Chinese men and women from entering America from 1882 to 1943.

Bill’s presentation, enhanced by Power Point data, delved deeply into the politics of the Exclusion Acts. He stressed the pivotal role of a Congress so fearful of the “yellow peril” that, over the years, it overrode two Presidential vetoes and influenced a Supreme Court to uphold the only law barring a single ethnic group—the Chinese—from American shores.

Although the Exclusion Acts were repealed in 1943, bitterness still remained among Chinese in America and throughout Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, since so many ethnic Chinese of the Qing Dynasty diaspora were affected. However, Bill was able to assure the audience that justice eventually prevailed when Congress officially apologized for the Acts in 2012.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Exclusion_Act)

How much do you know about the history of Chinese in America? Here below are a few tidbits of information from Bill’s lecture that may startle even the “experts.”

- Chinese sailors came as early as the 1600s to America via British and Spanish traders. Chinese from the Philippines settled in Spanish New Orleans in “Manila Village” which still exists.

- Chinese men fought in the Revolutionary War.


- The 13th Amendment gave citizenship to all persons born in the United States.

- So many Congressmen abstained from voting that the 1882 Exclusion Acts would not have passed if abstentions counted as no’s.

- The Exclusion Acts barred all ethnic Chinese from entering the U.S., including citizens of the British Commonwealth.

*The Old Guard is a Westchester organization of retired professional men founded in 1954.

Linda Ching Sledge
What Happened to Danny Chen?

By Vincent Young

The case of Private Danny Chen is a tragedy for all Asian Americans. Danny Chen was an Army enlistee from New York City who was posted to Afghanistan with high hopes for serving his country. Yet on October 3, 2011, shortly after arriving at the army base in Kandahar, he shot himself in the head. The little that his family was first told was disturbing: Chen might have been subjected to racially-charged harassment and hazing by his peers. The details that quickly emerged were explosive: in the six weeks before his death, Chen had been the daily target of racial slurs and systematic abuse including excessive work detail, being beaten, kicked and forced to crawl across gravel while being pelted by rocks. Eight servicemen, including five sergeants and one lieutenant, were named as instigators of the abuse.

Chen’s case might have been ignored by the American public if not for Elizabeth Ouyang, president of OCA-NY, the area where Danny Chen called home. Ouyang and her chapter, joined by OCA-National Center, sister OCA chapters and various Chinatown community groups, called for further investigation of the suspicious circumstances of Chen’s death and immediate punishment of the men whose actions had brought about Chen’s suicide. They comforted Chen’s family, conducted rallies and vigils and spoke out vociferously to the press.

After being rebuffed by the military, Ouyang and her team took their case to Washington. They gained an audience with the Secretary of the Army and met with Kirsten Gillibrand, Senator of New York and member of the Armed Services Committee. They were joined by members of Congress Judy Chu and Mike Honda. By this time, their goal was no less than a full Congressional inquiry and stateside court martial for the accused.

In 2012, the most serious charge, involuntary manslaughter, was dropped against the eight defendants. Eventually only four men were recommended for court martial. A large contingent of OCA supporters joined the Chen family at the hearings in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The results of the trials were deeply disappointing. Sgt. Adam Holcomb was found guilty of assault and battery and sentenced to 30 days of confinement, one level of reduction in rank and $1,181.55 in fine. Spc. Ryan Offut, who pleaded guilty, was sentenced to six months confinement, reduction in rank and a bad conduct discharge. Staff Sgt. Blaine Dugas received three months confinement and reduction in rank. Spc. Travis Carden received ten months in prison. Staff Sgt. Andrew Van Bockel was demoted two ranks, reprimanded and sentenced to 60 days hard labor of which 45 were forgiven because of pre-trial incarceration.

Needless to say, OCA chapters and Asian advocacy groups nationwide are outraged at the leniency of the sentences and are keeping the story alive in the media while continuing to press hard for long term reform in the military.

Tom Hayashi, Executive Director of OCA and Mee Moua, President of the Asian-American Justice Center, issued this joint statement after the outcome of the court-martials was made known:

“While we are encouraged by the military’s recognition that hazing and racial maltreatment are unacceptable by any standard, we continue to be disappointed by the leniency of the verdicts. We expect and will continue to demand full justice for Pvt. Chen’s death. His superiors must be held accountable for the lack of oversight and leadership that enabled members of the platoon to engage in acts of maltreatment, harassment and hazing.”

OCA-WHV has continued to provide financial and grass-roots support to the continuing mission to keep the Danny Case alive.
On December 10, 2012, at the White Plains YWCA, Mark Fang, Westchester County’s Human Rights Commissioner and OCA-WHV Board Member, chaired the County-wide commemoration of National Human Rights Day. Over 100 representatives came to hear and be heard: these hailed from various county non-profit and advocacy organizations and from educational and social services. Numerous county officials were present as well.

Two keynote speakers addressed hot button human rights issues emerging in the New York region. The first speaker, an advocate from the GLBTG community, urged support for the Gender Discrimination Act currently working its way through the State Senate.

The second speaker, OCA-WHV past president and board member Bill Kaung, brought the audience up-to-date with the Danny Chen case. Many in the audience were only partially informed about the case and the court martials then in progress. Bill, a veteran himself, remarked that he was lucky enough to have escaped the fate of Chen, who took his own life in 2011 after 6 months of race-based hazing and physical abuse. Bill described the role of OCA chapters nationwide in working with Congresswoman Judy Chu of California to push for a military anti-hazing bill in Congress.

A special award was given to Maria Imperial, CEO of the White Plains YWCA. In receiving the award, Imperial noted that the Y is more than a women’s organization. It is also an agency for political and social reform, having been one of the first organizations to speak out against lynching and the internment of the Japanese.

OCA-WHV congratulates Mark for representing us so well in County affairs and for raising serious issues that resonate far beyond local concerns.

Linda Ching Sledge
Ariane Kuo, internationally acclaimed yangqin virtuoso, has seen her star continue to rise since being named to OCA’s roster of Rising Star musicians at the age of 16. Ariane, now 19 and a student at Hunter College, is a seasoned performer whose playing has been a highlight at the 2010, 2011, 2012 OCA-WHV galas and at cultural festivals throughout the New York area. Her connection with our chapter is close and affectionate, as the following article, based on a recent conversation between Ariane and Newsletter editors, shows.

Born in Taiwan to a Taiwanese father and a Chinese-American mother, Ariane began formal study of the yangqin in third grade. Her love of the instrument was apparent from the first, she says. Yet her studies stopped when the family moved to New York. Yangqin players in America are a tiny, dedicated lot and the yangqin teachers who train them are rare indeed. Ariane could not find a teacher anywhere. Her family searched throughout the boroughs of New York for a teacher. Their search eventually yielded Li Liqun, a graduate of Beijing’s prestigious Chinese Cultural Music Academy and a renowned yangqin player. Li had earned Second Place in the All-China Competition in Beijing. She, like Ariane, was now a permanent resident of New York and looking for students.

Ariane remembers how hard it was to pick up the sticks again. Her muscles had stiffened. She had forgotten “everything” and had to begin again. Li Liqun was disciplined and tough. Li Liqun’s insistence on Ariane’s playing the notes “with feeling” was difficult to achieve. Hitting the strings to achieve certain sounds requires the use of different muscles. Some sounds demand that a player push on the strings, using the muscles of the back. Some sounds demand the use of the arm. Every note is different and cannot be played the same way.

As her technique matured, playing became a passion. In 2008, she won a Gold Medal at the International Competition for Traditional Chinese Music, making her one of the top young talents in the world of the yangqin. By this time, she had her very own instrument, a yangqin specially crafted by a famous factory in Beijing, sent to America by ship and selected by herself under the guidance of her teacher.

Ariane speaks of one memorable performance with particular emotion. During a competition, while playing a piece from Shan Shan Hong Xing (Sparkling Red Star), a 1974 film set in China in the 1930s during the Japanese invasion, Ariane felt herself enter the world summoned up by the notes. She describes the feeling as “falling asleep.” Suddenly the judges, the audience faded away and she saw vast mountain ranges, a landscape of red flowers, a long river. She heard singing in her ears, saw the battle unfold between Chinese patriots and the Japanese invaders, felt herself fill with pride as the Chinese soldiers claimed victory. Her fingers on the yangqin were calling this dramatic event in China’s history to life. Exhilarated and exhausted, Ariane wept when the piece was over.

These days, Ariane is busier than ever. She is an A-student at Hunter majoring in Accounting. She spends long hours each week at the yangqin perfecting her technique and performs whenever she can. She is also an accomplished violinist and pianist. Her piano teacher is none other than OCA-WHV Dynamic Achiever Awardee Rita Kuo, who urges Ariane to use her knowledge of piano to enhance her playing of the yangqin.
Rising Stars Concerts

2013 Rising Stars Concert at Steinway Hall in Manhattan

2013 Rising Stars Concert at Chappaqua Library Auditorium

2012 Rising Stars Concert at Chappaqua Library Auditorium
Membership Meeting at TD Bank in Scarsdale

$1,000 Scholarship check presented to Eve Larner, V.P. and Exec. Dir., Foundation for Westchester Community College.

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Special thank you to Bishara Al-Akeel and Gary Sledge for their assistance to the Newsletter Committee.
The annual Dynamic Achievers Gala is the signature event for OCA-WHV. On this special evening, our chapter recognizes outstanding Asian-Americans living and working in the Hudson Valley area for significant contributions to their respective fields and to the community-at-large. The competition is keen. Awardees represent distinguished individuals from academia, medicine and science, business, industry, government and arts and entertainment.

Since its inception in 1981, our chapter has recognized the work of more than 70 outstanding Asian-Americans through this annual award. The 2012 Gala held in November at the Hilton Doubletree Hotel in Tarrytown, New York, was particularly memorable since the many OCA-WHV participants crowding the ballroom were braving the aftereffects of Hurricane Sandy to honor the best and the brightest of Asians in our community.

2012 Dynamic Achievers were Lisa Eng, D.O., Co-founder of New Life Ob/Gyn and President of the Association of Chinese-American Physicians; Bernardine Han, Vice-President, News and Local Programming Division of Time Warner Cable Division and Brenda Sun, Co-Founder of both the Westchester Association of Chinese Americans as well as the Westchester Evergreen Association.

Three outstanding Asian-American high school seniors were named as winners of the 2012 OCA Student Leadership Awards. These were: Cynthia Y. Luo (1st place), Marianna Y. Zhang (2nd place) and Tiffany Jiang (3rd place.)

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of the coveted Community Service Award to our own Chester Mah, gifted photographer and volunteer extraordinaire.

The silent auction and the raffles (items donated by members) raised funds for the OCA-WHV Endowed Scholarship Fund at Westchester Community College and the OCA National Civil Rights Fellowship.

Everyone on the hardworking Gala Committee was delighted to see so many loyal members and friends (many without light or heat at home) coming together to make the annual Gala another great success.
OCA Westchester/Hudson Valley Community Outreach Activities

The OCA-WHV Community Outreach team arranged for Chinese Cultural Performances at three Westchester facilities:

**Willow Towers (United Hebrew Nursing Home) in New Rochelle, NY**

by Daniel Lewis

Ten dancers from the New York Chinese Cultural Center and their teacher, Jessie Yong, performed a Tibetan long sleeve dance and a fan dance. Ariane Kuo, an award winning, very talented young lady, played the Yang Qin and OCA Board members Rose Tan Kaung and Jenny Kho taught the seniors some Tai Qi movements and exercises. A good time was had by all, both nursing home residents and performers.

**Sunshine Children’s Home in Ossining, NY**

This is a critical care facility for seriously ill children and the Community Outreach team arranged for a performance for these wonderful children. Besides 12 New York Chinese Cultural Center dancers who performed Tibetan and Dai dances, Jessie Yong, their teacher, taught some of the children the basics of ribbon dancing and Ariane Kuo gave them a beautiful Yang Qin concert. The performers were thrilled to entertain the Sunshine children.

**Hearthstone at the Esplanade, Palisades, NY**
Film Review by Daniel Lewis and Kristine Cerchiara

Sponsored by Families with Children from China’s Westchester/Bronx Chapter, seventy five people, mostly adoptive parents, got together in Tarrytown on Saturday, March 9 to view Somewhere Between, a 2012 documentary film about four adopted Chinese American teenage girls.

The four girls, aged 13 to 15, considering themselves neither fully American nor fully Chinese, were seeking to understand where they fit in the world, thus giving the title to this moving and beautifully filmed documentary. As one of the girls, who speaks Mandarin, says at one point, “In either country I know I’m a foreigner.”

The girls are geographically spread across the United States and are four of more than 80,000 adopted by American parents since 1989. The director of the film, Linda Goldstein Knowlton, herself an adoptive parent, wanted to discover what challenges her young daughter would face as she grew up and thus, the project that turned into this film began. She thought that researching what older adopted girls went through and felt would give her the information she would need and prepare her to support her own daughter’s cultural and identity questions and struggles.

Out of the hundreds she interviewed, the four girls ultimately chosen by the director to be the focus of the film are both fascinating and accomplished. We see them evolve over a three year period and follow them as they pursue their quest for knowledge about themselves and experience life in the United States and abroad. One of the girls takes an interest in a young orphaned girl with severe Cerebral Palsy in a Chinese foster home and, along with her mother, is able to get this girl rehabilitative services and, ultimately, adopted by a loving American family.

The film focuses on each of the girls’ personal journey and experiences, but underlying, they all have something in common: abandonment and a desire to know more about their birth families. The emotional impact varies in intensity by girl, but all share a level of pain and self-doubt. Surprisingly, one of the girls is actually able to find her birth parents in China, an extremely rare event.

After the screening, the participants were fortunate enough to speak via Skype with one of the four girls and the director and asked many interesting questions about identity, how the girls are doing today and other related topics. This film was highly anticipated by the adoption community since word of the project was publicized two years ago and it did not disappoint. Both parents and teen adoptees alike have gained insights into understanding the complexities related to identity that can be experienced by trans-racial and trans-cultural adoptees.

This film is available on DVD from Amazon.com, downloadable from iTunes or directly from the Somewhere Between Web Site. Read a summary of the film at: www.somewherebetweenmovie.com/about-film View the trailer at: www.somewherebetweenmovie.com/
OCA-WHV 2013 Membership Drive

OCA Westchester & Hudson Valley is running its 33rd Anniversary Membership Drive.

2013 MEMBERSHIP RATES: Family: $50/year or $90/2 years or $180/5 years

Individual: $40/year or $70/2 years or $140/5 years

Senior (65 or older): $20/year or $30/2 years or $60/5 years

Youth/Student/YOCAA: $10/year

Lifetime Membership: $1,000 (Individual) or $1,500 (Family)

Download a Membership Application Form from our website: http://www.oca-whv.org

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