



# Columbus Asian Festival 25 Years

In Columbus, Ohio there are many things you can count on every Memorial Day Weekend. There will be Memorial Flag Planting ceremonies, the sun will be out, but always with a threat of rain, plenty of cookouts, the growing buzz for the Memorial Tournament, and for the last 25 years The Asian Festival kicking off the festival season in Central Ohio.

I still can't grasp that it has been 25 years since I first stepped foot into Franklin Park. I just wanted to grab some food and watch performances with friends. I remember being on the hunt for cotton candy and when I found it the machine wasn't working. Seeing the look of panic on the volunteers running the machine I jumped in to help get the cotton candy flowing again. Next thing I know I'm slinging sweet floss around a paper cone and doling it out to little kids. By the end of the day my fingers were glued together from melted sugar. A man came up to me named Dr. Lu and he walked me over to a food vendor that was serving green onion pancakes. Little did I know I had just signed my soul for the next 15 years for some left over cotton candy and a pancake.

9 months later I met Dr. Lu again along with Manju Sankarappa. They asked if I could volunteer again and find additional volunteers. For the next 14 festivals I became Dr Lu's right hand man, and Manju's personal assistant every



Memorial weekend until 2009.

The festival started off with two simple goals. The first was to showcase the culture and heritage of countries from all over Asia. The second was to give back to the community. If one were to envision what world peace would look like they would only need to visit the Asian Festival. The synergy of community and

cultural organizations, local businesses and corporations, political leaders, and individual volunteers is what grew the festival from 12,000 to over 180,000 in attendance in 25 years.

After 15 years of volunteering I grew from a kid into a father with his own kid at the end of the festival in 2009 I attached a trailer to my truck and made my move to Atlanta.

This past Saturday after 10 years I returned to visit the festival in it's 25th year! The original mission is still going strong, but so much has changed. Kid's are running around singing the latest BTS (Korean Pop) song while snapping selfies with performers and cultural artwork. Festival attendees are posting pictures of the latest asian fusion dish or cup of bubble tea. You can still get your spring roll and green curry, but you'll also find a steam bun made to look like Hello Kitty, or a giant egg roll as big as your mouth! There are 4 performance stages, a career fair, sponsors showing off their companies, a health fair where eastern and western medicine sit side by side ready to help anyone who comes by. The market place offers everything from lessons, to bonsai trees.

For 25 years the festival has bridged communities by educating its visitors through food, performances, and exhibits. The world is becoming more divisive, hate and bigotry is visible all around us, but inside this park for two days kindness, respect, a celebration of culture and heritage is what brings everyone together. Asian Festival has been successful in it's mission for 25 years and I encourage everyone to come volunteer, step up as a leader and be a part of it's mission to celebrate and give back for another 25 years! <http://www.asian-festival.org/ways-you-can-help>

Long X. Tran

