



# The Cleveland Asian Festival Makes a Successful Return By Wayne Wong

The annual Cleveland Asian Festival, started in 2010, had its last in-person event in 2019. With a two year break due to the pandemic, the Festival received overwhelming support for the return of an in-person event on May 21-22, including over 30,000 attendees during the weekend, 122 hard working volunteers, the generous sponsors that make everything possible, over 100 vendors and exhibitors, committed partners, and the talented performers and martial artists. NE Ohio was hungry for the return of the best showcase of Asian food and culture that highlighted the growing AsiaTown neighborhood.

Organizers committed to holding the Festival particularly due to the negative impact the pandemic had on area businesses and the rise in Anti-Asian hate. Formal and informal surveys through the years indicate that roughly 25% of the attendees are new to AsiaTown, which means over 100,000 people have been introduced to the neighborhood. Survey results also indicate that most of the attendees will return to AsiaTown to dine or shop - which is one of the primary goals of the Festival: to help drive the growth of the AsiaTown neighborhood, and contribute to the rich diversity of Cleveland. Other goals include sharing of the Asian culture with all people, and celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage month in May.

The many excellent and diverse Asian food offerings continued to be one of the biggest draws of the festival. Additionally, the two tent-covered stages were packed with attendees eager to see the amazing martial arts demonstrations, Colors of Asia Fashion show, and many wonderful cultural performances representing Chinese, Indian, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, Nepalese, Karen and other ethnicities. A festival highlight was the 5th Asian-Pop / K-Pop dance competition which drew contestants from all over Ohio including Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus and NE Ohio. The 5K team won \$1000 1st place, Classick won \$500 2nd 500, and Solar Dance Team won \$250 3rd place. The Festival was made possible by Distinguished Sponsor JACK Entertainment, and Presenting Sponsors: City of Cleveland, Cleveland Public Power, Northeast



Ohio Regional Sewer District, Ward 7 Councilwoman Stephanie Howse, and OCA Greater Cleveland that sponsored all performances through a grant from Cuyahoga Arts and Culture. Many other sponsors were essential to the festival's success.

Keeping with tradition, the Festival was kicked off with the Kwan Family Lion Dance, a customary performance that brings luck to auspicious occasions in Asian culture. This was followed by a Welcome that included City of Cleveland representatives from Mayor Bibb's admin-

istration Joyce Huang, Director of City Planning (and former Festival Executive Committee member), Roy Fernando, Chief Innovation and Technology Officer, Cleveland Ward 7 Council Woman Stephanie Howse, Brunswick Mayor Ron Falconi, 3rd District Police Commander Todd, and special guests from the Cleveland Guardians, Rookie of the Month in April Stephen Kwan, and 2nd baseman Yu Chang.

Joining Lead Master of Ceremonies (MC) Wayne Wong, were local celebrities who served as guest MCs: Lynna Lai from WKYC Channel 3, Chris Tanaka from WOIO Channel 19, Homa Bash from WEWS Channel 5, and Isabel Lawrence from WKYC Ch 3, all of whom did a fantastic job and helped share the Festival to their TV news fans.

Rather than the Activities pavilion, this year, fun activities were dispersed throughout the footprint including several photo op stations, dance-dance revolution, Asian free library story book reading, and demonstrations of the Chinese Game of Go. The Festival mascots CAF Panda, and Wu Shu the Dragon were joined by new Mascot, Lao Hu the Tiger (for this Year of the Tiger) who were all very popular as they took photos with guests and danced throughout. The health Pavilion continues to provide free health screenings, and COVID vaccination and boosters. Additionally, this year the Festival initiated a Green Team that set up waste separation stations to divert from the landfill and instead recycle materials and compost food products. The Asian American Coalition of Ohio also set up a seven panel history display that commemorates the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad 153 years ago that was largely built by Chinese immigrant laborers.

The 2022 Cleveland Asian Festival was produced by co-founders Lisa Wong and Johnny Wu, working with the Executive Committee members Vi Huynh (co-founder), Mike Mendoza, Wayne Wong, and Oanh Powell (Debbie Yue on sabbatical). They along with dozens of committee members, and over a hundred day-volunteers made the Festival's return an amazing success. Thank you for attending and supporting the event!

*Photo Credit - Edmond Wong, Alex Wong and Wayne Wong*

