

Thousands watch parade in Flushing

Queens rings in Year of the Ox during Lunar New Year event

By Anna Gustafson Wednesday, February 4, 2009 3:32 PM EST

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A dragon from New Tang Dynasty Television snakes up Main Street during the Lunar New Year parade in Flushing Saturday. Photo by Christina Santucci

Thousands of city residents filled Flushing streets Saturday to brave the cold and watch the 14th annual Lunar New Year Parade, which brought more than 4,000 dragon dancers, performers, members of Asian organizations and politicians to the central Queens community.

“We come to the parade every year,” said Jian Yang, who moved to Flushing from central China 10 years ago. “It’s very important for my daughters to come to these events so they know about China and the Chinese community here. This is one of the country’s biggest Asian communities here, and I love it.”

The parade is the centerpiece of Flushing’s Lunar New Year celebration, hosted by the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub Business Improvement District, which began Jan. 24 and wraps up Feb. 14. Mabel Law, the BID executive director, estimated there were more than 10,000 people at the parade celebrating the Year of the Ox.

The procession, which lasted from 11 a.m. until a little before 1 p.m., began at Union Street and 37th Avenue, traveled south on Union Street, turned onto Sanford Avenue and then Kissena Boulevard and finally merged with Main Street, ending at the corner of Main Street and 39th Avenue.

More than 50 community organizations participated in the parade, which boasted everything from colorful floats to traditional Korean and Chinese dancers. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, U.S. Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-Forest Hills), city Comptroller William Thompson, City Councilman John Liu (D-Flushing), U.S. Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-Bayside), state Assemblywoman Grace Meng (D-Flushing) and state Sen. Toby Stavisky (D-Whitestone) attended the event.

“When you are in America, this is a way to stick to your roots,” said

Flushing resident Randy Ng, coach of an 80-person dragon boat team. "Our dance is the traditional New Year's dance to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck."

Ng and his team of dancers, who hail from the five boroughs, spent two months preparing for the parade and even ordered their elaborate and colorful costumes from Hong Kong.

Besides the parade, there were New Year's celebrations all day in Flushing, and the Flushing Chinese Business Association hosted activities at the Sheraton Hotel on 39th Avenue and the Korean American Association of Queens sponsored events at the Dae Dong Manor on Northern Boulevard. At the library there were Korean and Chinese food preparation classes and traditional dance and song.

"We use red envelopes to make the lanterns on which we have characters that spell out good luck on them," said Man-Li Kuo Lin, a Long Island resident originally from Taiwan who headed a Chinese lantern class at the library Saturday afternoon. "In China, many women will get together to make the lanterns before the New Year, and it's a very happy time."

The Lunar New Year, or Spring Festival, is considered the most important of the traditional Chinese and Korean holidays. The two-week-long festival begins on the first day of the lunar calendar and ends with what is known as the Lantern Festival.

Jan. 26 marked the beginning of the Year of the Ox, considered a sign of fortitude and hard work in Asian cultures.

"It was a really good showing this year," Law said. "We even had people coming from Connecticut and Vermont for it. It has become really popular."

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