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Cortland Standard

Local News

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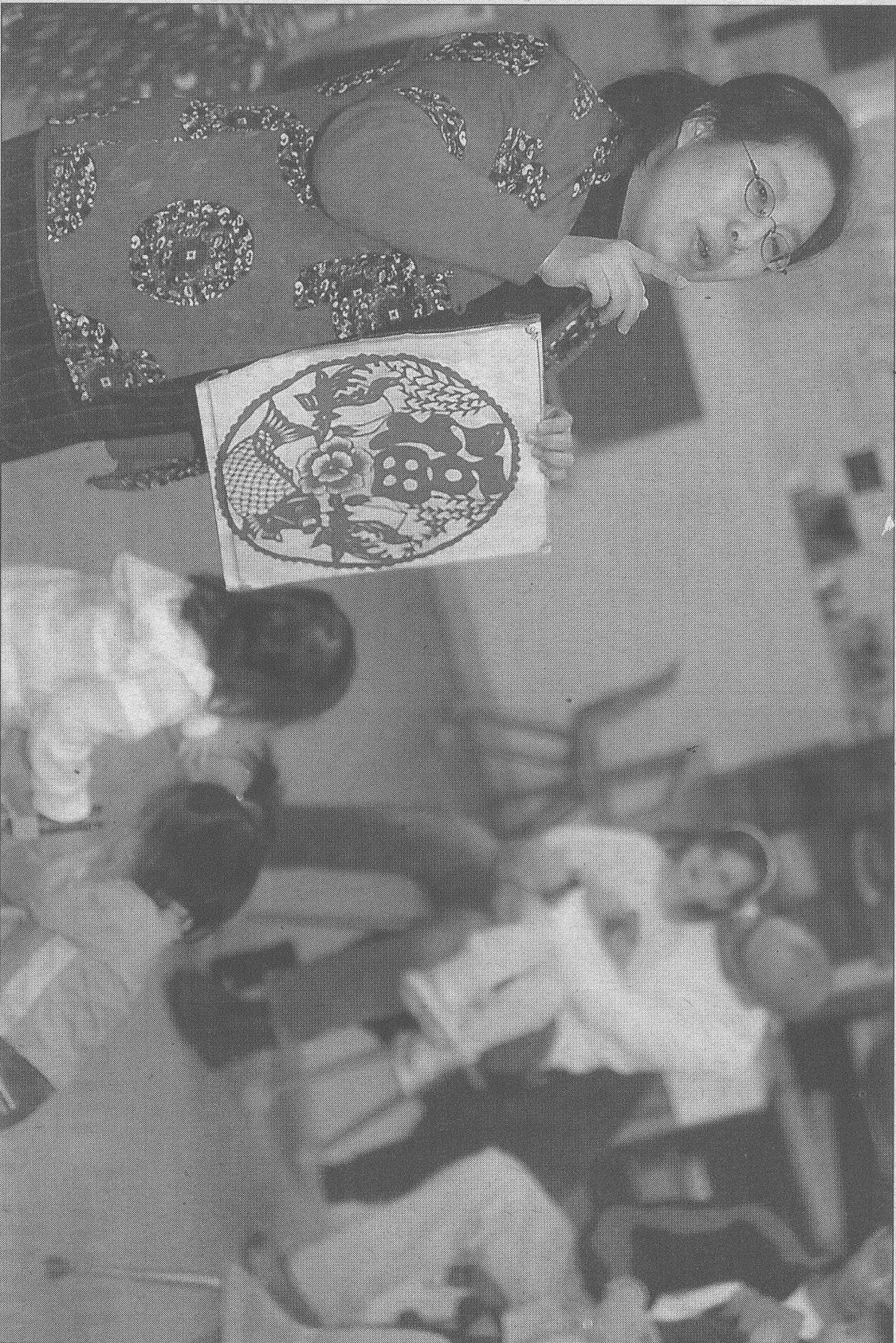
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Lin Lin, assistant professor at SUNY Cortland, teaches children and their parents the traditional Chinese New Year blessing during a celebration of the Chinese New Year at the Children's Museum Saturday. The Chinese New Year begins Thursday.

Joe McIntyre/staff photographer

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Chinese New Year celebrated

Children's Museum hosts program for the Year of the Rat

By EVAN GEIBEL
Staff Reporter

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CORTLAND — While the Western celebration of the New Year has passed, the Chinese New Year will just be getting started Thursday. But those whole celebrate the Chinese New Year don't have to squeeze all their partying into a single night — they have 15 days to wish each other prosperity and good health in the coming months.

The focus during the Chinese New Year celebration is on family, SUNY Cortland professor Lin Lin said Saturday.

Lin hosted an event observing the New Year at the Children's Museum in the basement of O'Heron Newman Hall on Calvert Street.

The traditional Chinese calendar is based on lunar cycles, as opposed to the sun-based Western calendar, which the Chinese also use.

This year will be the Year of the Rat. The Chinese give each year an animal identifier, which rotates over a 12-year cycle.

Lin prepared for the imminent arrival of eager youngsters by teaching the student volunteers how to fold one of her personal favorites when it comes to origami, a traditional Japanese art of folding paper to create shapes of animals and other objects.

"This fish, I love it because my mother taught it to me when I was very young," Lin told the six volunteers from the Early Childhood education department at the college.

Because it involves not only folding but cutting, it's a little beyond origami proper, Lin said. But it's still fun and unique and she's never found a depiction of this style of fish in any origami book she has looked through.

The students folded and cut the paper to form the fish, some better than others.

Laura Albers, a junior who hails from Amityville in Suffolk County, seemed surprised that her first attempt at folding together a fish worked so well.

"That's pretty cool. I'm not going to lie, that's pretty cool," Albers said as she beheld her fish, and soon began helping her peers make the folds in the right places.

Lin said that the fish, or "Yu," are important to the Chinese New Year celebration and are common decorations at this time because they symbolize the surplus health and wealth that everyone hopes will visit them in the coming year.

"Every Chinese New Year's dinner will include some kind of fish," Lin said.

As children and their parents pulled into the museum, Lin and her helpers pulled the chairs into a semicircle and began to introduce the visitors to some new traditions.

She explained that the first of the year was the time when everybody donned their new clothes and went to their family's houses. Lin said that they wish each other "Xin Nian Ho," which means "Happy New Year."

Even some of the youngest children picked up on that quickly, so it was fortunate that SUNY Cortland professor Stephen Yang was on hand to help stretch minds further by providing the Cantonese dialect's version of the saying — "Gung Hey Fat Choy."

"There's always a debate, because between the two dialects there's always a few idiosyncrasies," Yang explained afterward as he fed his daughter some tiny chunks of dumpling that Lin had brought in for a snack.

Lin explains that red is a "very auspicious color," and adorns not only brides in traditional Chinese ceremonies but also the houses during the

New Year's festival. Red banners flank doors and windows, with rhyming couplets printed on them.

During the 15-day celebration, houses are cleaned for a fresh start, haircuts are given, and no food is cooked — Lin said that cooking is frowned upon and so families stock up on easily reheatable meals in advance.

And throughout it all, Lin said that there are fireworks, lanterns and the lion dance, which involves many people donning a large dragon costume and dancing and writhing through the streets.

The group soon scattered to individual tables to begin folding the fish with the help of the students.

Junior Brian Monica of Baldwinsville had brought his two children, Zachary, 7, and Abigail, 8, along while he volunteered. Although he was worried he would be the "bad example" of how to fold the fish, he folded fine and Abigail picked it up quickly as well, folding two perfect fish in only a few minutes.

Like Abigail Monica, Parker Benjamin, 8, of Cortland learned that he has an affinity for the steamed dumplings Lin brought. Parker, who was brought to the event by his grandparents, Doug and Connie Bentley of Cortland, said he had done some origami in art class at school and couldn't wait to get started on his fish.

Melissa LeVick of Cortland had brought her 3 1/2-year-old daughter, Kaleigh, to the event. Dumplings just weren't cutting it anymore and Kaleigh wanted some lunch, reluctant to say "Xin Nian Ho" as she had earlier.

LeVick said Kaleigh had been adopted from China and that the family wants both the young girl and the family as a whole to learn as much about Chinese culture as possible.

"I enjoyed hearing all about the different foods and celebrations," LeVick said.

WORKS property at 7

● District 7-2 police in the city, normal Park, has been relocated County Office Building Central Avenue. The be located in the basement level

Howe said with 1 in this year's presidential election he is hoping voters ber how much power

"There seems to be interest then there he past," Howe said. "That with the outgrowth, the field is and there is a lot of

The sense I get is Barack Obama has more interest to you tered voters. I'm going people are more likely will affect them in State, health care."

Howe said because many date is earlier New York will not have opportunity to see the and hear debates.

— Aimee Milks, State

Icy road cause accident

Emergency crews busy responding to an accident and after the ugly day.

The State Police responded to 19 accidents and into Saturday's hours. Most occurred state 81 in the morning afternoon, but there were accidents on Route 11 as well, with no major

School officials said many in attendance