

San Francisco Chinatown Corps reaches 125 year milestone

Hong Kong Island East Musical Force is a featured guest.



The march of witness as seen from above. Photo by Michael Mustacchi

By Laine Hendricks

The San Francisco Chinatown Corps—the first Chinese Salvation Army Corps in the world—celebrated its 125th anniversary in August.

“God, Our Help through the Ages,” from Psalm 90:1, was the celebration theme: *Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations* (KJV). For Corps Officers Majors Thomas and Joy Mui and Lt. Colonel Check Hung Yee, Order of the Founder—who served at the San Francisco Chinatown Corps for 67 years—this is a vivid scriptural reference that reflects the historical significance of the San Francisco Chinatown Corps’ 125 years of service.

“The purpose of this celebration is to let people know that mission of The Salvation Army never changes,” Thomas Mui said. “We are always extending our service hands to the community wherever and whenever there are needs.”

At the opening event Aug. 13, San Francisco Mayor Edwin Lee proclaimed the day “Salvation Army San Francisco Chinatown Corps Day.” Lee recalled many corps memories including the American Cook School that equipped Chinese immigrants with necessary culinary skills to find employment and his own marriage 31 years ago at the corps with Yee presiding over the ceremony. Lee then joined Lt. Colonel Samuel Pho, commanding officer of the Hong Kong and Macau Command, in the traditional

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Chinese “waking the lions” ceremony.

The nine-day celebration included two open-air meetings, five public concerts, two marches of witness, two worship services, two banquet dinners and a community health fair.

Western Territorial Leaders Commissioners James and Carolyn Knaggs attended the march of witness through San Francisco Chinatown.

A brass band, songster and timbrel brigade and a worship team from the Hong Kong Island East Corps joined in the milestone occasion. The group—the “Musical Force USA Mission Team,” comprised of 49 youth and adults under the direction of Majors Tony and Elen Ma—performed at Pier 39, the Bayview Opera House, the San Francisco Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center, San Francisco Silvercrest Residence, the Pacific Renaissance Plaza (Oakland), Portsmouth Square and the streets of San Francisco. Lt. Colonels Samuel and Donni Pho accompanied the ensemble with their daughters, Naomi and Hannah, who performed duets throughout the week.

Army’s service to the community recognized

At a banquet at the Empress of China in San Francisco’s Chinatown, Golden State Divisional Leaders Lt. Colonels Steve and Marcia Smith and San Francisco Supervisor David Chiu presented a certificate of honor to the corps on behalf of the Board of Supervisors. A team from Wells Fargo Bank presented a check for \$15,000 for the corps’ after-school program. Also, 15 advisory board members and soldiers were honored for outstanding service to the corps. Accolades went to Kit Har Pong, a Salvation Army soldier who has served the Army in China and San Francisco faithfully for 73 years. Yee delivered the message.

“Today, we celebrate not what we have accomplished, but praise to God for his leading,” Yee said. “He is faithful. If he has led us this far, he will do the same in the years to come. In as much as there is nothing new under the sun, so the love of God endures forever.”

Del Oro Divisional Leaders Majors Doug and Colleen Riley joined the parade through Oakland Chinatown Members of Salvation Army corps throughout the Bay Area participated; each march included over 150 Salvationists.

This corps has a rich history in the “Old Gold Mountain,” a name still used by corps members. During the California Gold Rush in 1883, The Salvation Army began planting ministries along the West Coast.

Legendary Dr. Fong Foo-Sec was one person touched by the Army’s zeal toward God and people. Overcoming his childhood of poverty, he earned a Ph.D. and LL.D. before becoming an officer in The Salvation Army. He is famous for planting ministries in San Francisco’s Chinatown in 1886.

San Francisco Chinatown Corps members are known for providing assistance to disaster victims. They have been present at and/or held relief fundraisers for the San Francisco Earthquake in 1906, the Mexico and China earthquakes in the 1980s, the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, the South Asia Tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. The corps is a resource center to the local Chinese community, providing educational opportunities for new immigrants in addition to its regular service and ministry programs.