

TACAS YG Beach Trip Highlights

After months of planning, the TACAS Youth Group Beach Trip to Emerald Isle was finally carried out on Thursday, April 13, the weekend of Easter Sunday embedded with 2 extra holidays from the area schools. The main objective of this annual event is to let the TACAS YG members from various schools develop a bonding friendship and make new friends by inviting non-YG youths and even non-Chinese descendants. Moreover, it creates an environment for the YG members to discuss other community service opportunities.

Under the strenuous recruiting efforts by the YG Board members, Zethus Suen, Ben Tan, Mario Yang and Lauren Li, a near-record turnout went to the beach after school on Thursday. With 29 youths and 22 adults, we have funs, laughs, thrills, in addition to the challenges of preparing the meals for all 51 participants. The activities on the beach trip include Scavenger Hunt, Catch Phrase, Capture the Flag, Clamming, etc. The YG Board Members also decide to hold two competition events -- Sand Sculpture and Dumpling Making -- to cultivate spirits of team building and of cooperation enhancement.

The Dumpling Making Competition: Learning and Keeping the Tradition

The Dumpling Making Competition started on Friday, right after the breakfast. The parent-in-charge of this event is Vicky Yang. She first announced the rules and the grading criteria, and then divided the adults and youths into 3 separate groups. The ingredients, flour, grounded pork, Napa cabbage and what not, were distributed to the adults who kneaded the dough, chopped the cabbage, and diced the scallions, for their group youths. Karan, an India descendant and fellow student of Mario Yang, declared well ahead that he will win this competition. This adds the extra stimulus to all the Chinese descendants who want to do their best in order to keep the “crown jewel” of this century old tradition of Dumpling Making. By 3:30, it started. All youths began to learn how to roll the dough to form the “skin” for the dumplings. At first, one sees all shapes—octagon, square and the like -- except the round ones. And the thickness of the skin is simply, well, too thick. However, with their dedication, concentration and eagerness of learning, they have finally learnt the rope of making perfectly round and thin skins. By the time of wrapping the prepared ingredients in the skins, again, we have various forms and sizes. There are dumplings that are “too tired to stand up”, “too excited with gaping openings”, “too fat with bursting fillings” and “too skinny with starving skeleton only”. Again, their young dexterous fingers and receptive minds work their magic and result in making perfectly plumb and sitting dumplings. The adults gave them the approval nodding smiles.

By 6:30, it is time to present their products. They put the boiled and fried dumplings in plates with very creative decorations (check them out in the www.tacasyg.org). Some youths even tried to have some “small talks” – networking -- with the judges. So the 3 judges, Michele Hsu, Ruey Li, and Shu-Ching Shaw, have to declare that they have their integrity, won't be swayed and influenced, and have to be left alone in making the final

decision. Even though all 3 groups were awarded for their efforts, they were nevertheless judged accordingly. The award for each of the 2nd runner-up team members is the homemade dough rollers, an indication that they would practice more (at home?) and come back next year to win this event.

The Sand Sculpture Competition: Excitement and Creativity.

Right after breakfast on Saturday, even those responsible for washing the dishes rushed to finish their chores and joined their assigned teams. The four groups took their pails, sand forks and other tools to the beach. They first elected a team captain, decided the theme and then worked coordinately. The impartial judges from the Happy Mama Club, pacing back and forth, saw the youths, digging, shaping, slapping, chiseling, watering, molding and working in concerted efforts, filtered with shouts and roaring. The judges were also busily and seriously grading them accordingly.

The event was originally scheduled to end within 1 hour, but was padded with 30 minutes upon requests from the yearning hearts of the youths. . At last, the team led by Zethus Suen won with a sculpture that one see a submerging Chinese Dragon, with finely decorated scales with the shells and horns and whiskers with sea weeds, all found on the beach. The second place went to the team led by Apollo Suen, Zethus's brother. They sculpted a Giant Tar Heel that stumped and crushed a LIVE youth member who prostrated on the sand. Aside from the four groups, there are 3 young boys between 11 and 12 years of age, who came with their older siblings, volunteered to form the fifth team. They actually built a Sand Castle, encircled with a moat, with inner city protected by an outside city. They even gave a lecture to the judges about Medieval Castle, which the judges have to have awarded them with a Special Recognition.

This Sand Sculpture event fully demonstrates the creativity, the artistry and the cooperation of these youths. No wonder it is being an annual event.

Meal Preparation: Challenge and Taste

It is a passed-down tradition that all meals in the beach trip are prepared by the adults/parents. The Mamas have to cook all the meals while the Papas lead and monitor the physical activities. Well before the trip, the parents met several times to decide the menu, the chef, and the assistants. You see, meals for 51 people with entrées, side dishes, drinks, fruits, desserts, and the afternoon and evening snacks are a task that equates running a restaurant. Yet, with the cooperation tradition and the assistance from the Happy Mama Club, this task looks so easy. (Happy Mama Club is formed by a group of TACAS ladies who love cooking. They met each month to have the designated members to show off their menu and demonstrate their specialty dishes. Even though their boys or girls have already graduated and left for colleges, they came to this annual beach trip -- with full payment -- to show their support and perhaps to refresh their memories of those bygone lovely days). We have to extend our special thanks to the Mama Club members of Michele Hsu, Shu-Ching Shaw and their husbands, to Ruey Li and

her daughter. They came to cook for the youths, and served as the event judges as well. No wonder the youths have such a great appetite and fun.

As for the youths, we are surprised to see that all of them can use chopsticks and like the traditional Chinese breakfast – congee with shredded pork (rou song). The Sunday morning breakfast of a huge pot of congee was gulped down within a matter of minutes, leaving no traces for the late comers. Even more surprising is that Karan, the India-descendant, and Nicolas, a Chile-descendant, also enjoy the same food.

Aside from the mouth-watering food prepared by the Mama Club members, the parents also have their shares of enjoyment. They exchange tips and tricks in cooking, passing information about raising families and strengthening their friendship.

Retrospect and Perspective:

Ever since the beach trip two years ago, my whole family fell in love with it. And this year I am honored to organize it. This Beach Trip does offer the opportunity for YG members to mingle together, to have fun and to develop friendship. The youths, after the trip, continue to talk about such other opportunities as community services, Lion Dance, Dragon Dance and the TACAS Mother's Day Celebration, and of course, participating again next year. Seeing the development and maturing processes that our second generation is experiencing, I, as a mother, feel quite satisfied and well rewarded.

At the end, let me thank again those 3 couples from the Mama Club, and the parents of the YG members, Sam and Libby Suen, Yih-Shin and Yih-Wen Tan, Liang and Susie Li, Shu-Yan and Su-Ping Ho, Sam and Brenda Tie, Sharon Jiang and our new friends, Mr. and Mrs. Xing Chao. Their assistance and dedication fill this trip with memories and laughs for years to come. I sincerely hope that more new faces will show up next year and this event will last as long as it can be.