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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2007

The Sacramento Bee

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Spotlight on Chinatown

The mall between Third, Fifth, J and I streets has colorful history to share.

By **Lakiesha McGhee**
BEE STAFF WRITER

Sacramento's Chinatown doesn't have the fame of the more bustling Chinese markets in San Francisco or New York, but a team working to revitalize the area wants to show that its history is just as rich.

The Chinatown Mall Revitalization Committee has teamed with Sacramento to host the first Chinatown Mall Culture Fair on Sept. 23.

The free event will highlight Chinese culture and history and promote the Chinatown Mall, between Third, Fifth, J and I streets.

The area -- mostly home to Chinese associations -- is full of colorful tales that few people know, organizers say. One significant point

in history is when the "father of modern China," Sun Yat-sen, wrote portions of the country's constitution in an upstairs room of the Bing Kong Tong headquarters on I Street, said Steve Yee, chairman of Friends of the Yee Fow Museum.

"To the Chinese, especially the older Chinese, Sun Yat-sen is like George Washington," Yee said, adding that the mall features a memorial to him.

Sun Yat-sen helped to overthrow the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and became the first provisional president when the Republic of China was founded in 1912.

The granddaughter of the revolutionary, Lily Sui-Fong Sun, will travel from her home in Hawaii to attend the culture fair as a guest lecturer. Sui-Fong Sun will speak at the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall in the center of the mall.

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Event: Lion dance, martial arts are highlights

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She will autograph books she wrote about her grandfather's life and donate all proceeds from the sale of the books to benefit future Chinatown Mall fairs and activities, Yee said. The special program is befitting the event's theme, "Bridging the Past to the Future."

For the fair's debut Sept. 23, organizers also have lined up several performances, including a lion dance, Chinese martial arts, live music, dances and a fashion show. Visitors can participate in hands-on activities or watch demonstrations of calligraphy, origami, Chinese lanterns, Chinese chess, tai chi, mah-jongg and Chinese cooking.

CHINATOWN MALL STREET FAIR**When:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sept. 23**Where:** Chinatown Mall, between Third, Fifth, J and I streets**Contact:** Wai Moy at (916) 543-3279 or email moyw@sbcglobal.net

Wai Moy, chairwoman of the Chinatown Mall Culture Fair, said last week that 36 community organizations have signed up to participate.

"We want to let people know that there is a Chinatown in Sacramento and that it is a good place to go and do business," Moy said.

Chinatown Mall has a quiet, parklike setting. Many who visit for the first time may wonder if there is anything happening at all, Moy said.

"Renovations in the past few years

have made the place more useful," Moy said.

In the 1960s, the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency established Chinatown Mall in the area where the Confucius Temple had been built. The mall is occupied by 11 Chinese family associations that oversee the temple and a Chinese language school, which also is in the mall.

On a typical day, Chinese elders can be found practicing their morning tai chi while other visitors may be heard shuffling tiles in a passionate mah-jongg game, Yee said.

Many Chinese migrated to Sacramento during the Gold Rush era and worked to build the Central Pacific Railroad. During the 1940s

and 1950s, settlers from China were merchants, restaurateurs, laundrymen, entrepreneurs, peddlers and provided a conglomerate of other services.

Sacramento's Chinatown was on I Street, close to where Old Sacramento is today. The area was a refuge for Chinese who faced hostility from the general population, Yee said. It also was home to Chinese theater.

Members of the Chinatown Mall and Thomas Enterprises are in the early stages of planning a Yee Fow Museum in the city's railyard, a 240-acre site across from Chinatown Mall. The site is the same area of China Slough, Sacramento's first Chinatown, Yee said.