

COMMUNITY & CULTURE: Honoring Springs' Asian heritage

By: **Angela Seals** November 16, 2016 *Updated: November 16, 2016 at 11:35 am*



Golden Lotus Foundation founder **Cynthia Chung Aki**, right, with composer **Wang Jie**. Aki runs the 5-year-old nonprofit from her home in the Cheyenne Mountain area. Photo courtesy of the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region

Tucked into the side of Cheyenne Mountain off Star Ranch Road is the headquarters of one of our city's most ambitious cultural heritage organizations, the Golden Lotus Foundation. You might not have noticed this vibrant hub of Asian cultural exchange so very near you because, for now, Golden Lotus is still based out of the home of its founder, Cynthia Chung Aki.

In just five years, the Golden Lotus Foundation has catalyzed a lively local scene centered around the experience of Asian art and cultural traditions,

primarily from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and India. Diverse programs throughout the year include folklore story times for children, Asian dinners for senior citizens, haiku workshops, music performances, art exhibitions, lectures and panels. This vivid diversity is also evidenced in the attendees of Golden Lotus events, who might be of Asian descent, military members once stationed in Asia, exchange students, Asian tourists visiting our region or local residents whose travels or work take them to Asian countries.

Such a wide-ranging scope is part of an intentionally inclusive philosophy at the Golden Lotus Foundation. It does work passionately to reconnect Americans of Asian descent with their cultural heritage, but it also seeks to inspire locals and tourists with the universally captivating art, foods, music, dance and customs of Asian cultures.

These two missions are woven together in Aki's ambitious vision to build an Asian Cultural Heritage Center in Colorado Springs, including botanical gardens, a tea house and space for the offices of Golden Lotus Foundation and other local Asian heritage organizations. The center would become a hub for cultural exchange and a draw for tourists.

"We do not have a single stone erected to our cultures here," Aki said. "We need a physical structure beyond one-day festivals."

Golden Lotus Foundation believes so strongly in the need for a world-class Asian Cultural Heritage Center they are seeking to raise \$60 million for a capital fund to build it. Private donors have come forward to fund the planned botanical garden.

This visionary project from an organization still based in its founder's home speaks to the energy of Aki and her board of directors, along with their optimism about the future of Colorado Springs.

“Golden Lotus Foundation desires to transform the city’s cultural landscape to become economically and culturally competitive,” reads their organization overview. Golden Lotus’s global perspective and grass-roots vibrancy offer new ideas to expand tourism, attract businesses and workers and grow Colorado Springs’ reputation on the Front Range and beyond.

But behind all of this lofty cross-cultural bridge building — and possibly tea house building — are disarmingly personal stories from Aki’s life. One afternoon, her neighbors’ 4-year-old adopted daughter noticed Aki at the mailbox and said, “You have black hair just like me!” Aki felt deeply the innate connection of shared heritage. When her son was physically assaulted in middle school in a racially motivated episode, his emotional wounds revealed a need for more pride in his heritage.

“I felt if Daniel had confidence that his Japanese ancestors were Samurai warriors, judo experts, philosophers whose words still are repeated, he may have been stronger to pull through this,” Aki said.

Having lunch with Aki, I heard many personal stories like this that illustrate the need for cultural understanding in our global world and in our local city. These are the stories that motivate the mission of Golden Lotus Foundation. And Aki shared, in her effervescent, tireless way, about her role models who were “just one person” but made a huge difference in her story.

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