Riled and united by the Committee on Census and Redistricting's first proposed map which, first seen before Thanksgiving, split Chinatown in half, many residents of Chinatown, as well as Mission Hill and South Boston, turned up to the latest redistricting hearing on December 9 to look at Councilor Linehan’s newest proposed map (Docket #1591), as well as voice their concerns and opinions, mostly on the speed at which the process is happening.

“It’s the law that we do this every 10 years after a Federal Census,” Councilor Linehan, who also serves as Chairman of the Committee on Census and Redistricting, said at the hearing. “The population grew to 617,594, which is 28,453 over what it was 10 years ago. [The population] grew by 4.8 percent.”

Further noting that the population grew disproportionately, Linehan made clear the requisites that “each district must be plus or minus five percent of 66,631. Four districts need to cut population (1, 2, 7, and 8). Three districts need to add population (3, 4, and 6).”

“By law, seven districts must change,” Linehan said.

Linehan’s first proposed map caused a stir in many residents of Boston - with much discontent coming from Chinatown - many of whom felt that Linehan was gerrymandering after his close victory at the recent elections, where he won over Suzanne Lee by fewer than 100 votes.

Despite drawing a new map with new district lines, few in attendance at the hearing were pleased, including the city councilors.

“I know it’s not an easy [process]. At the end, no matter what map you present, someone is going to be unhappy, I suspect,” Councilor-at-large Felix Arroyo said, addressing Linehan. “With that said… I would like to see this map as another draft that we could start making changes to.”

“I do believe that neighborhoods that are currently whole in the council districts should remain so,” Arroyo said. “And I think that neighborhoods that are not whole, we should make a very honest effort to make them whole.”

Echoing the sentiments of Councilor Arroyo, members of the audience were given the opportunity to testify to the councilors. Many Chinatown residents took the opportunity to press the point of neighborhood unity and time.

“First I want to thank you, Chairman Linehan, for keeping Chinatown whole and for restoring the community and accepting community input into this process,” Executive Director of BCN Elaine Ng said. “At this point, with this map, I would like to respectfully request that you slow down the process so that we can look at really keeping neighborhoods whole.”

“As a resident of Boston, I’m really concerned about how the rest of the city is segregated,” Ng added. “If we could take advantage of the opportunity of time, and to take a really deep look at how our neighborhoods function… I think that’s an important step to take.”

“I strongly urge you, the committee, and the city councilors to take your time and to have as great a process as I think, the state has undergone for the state redistricting,” said Arroyo.

SEE NEW MAP, PAGE 3

**NEW REDISTRICTING MAP PROPOSAL**

Chinatown residents express concerns at Redistricting Hearing

By Teresa Cheong

The Asian American Civic Association (AACA) hosted the City of Malden’s newly elected Mayor Gary Christenson as part of its Fall 2011 Community Forum series on Thursday, Dec. 1, 2011 at 12 - 1 p.m. More than 75 attendees crowded into AACA’s fourth-floor conference room to listen to Christenson speak on “Embracing Diversity in the City of Malden.”

“Mr. Christenson is known for his efforts in connecting with people and embracing different ethnic groups, including the Asian American community,” said Mary Chin, President of the Asian American Civic Asso-

SEE COLLEGE DAY, PAGE 3
The Christmas lights are lit, the Lexus red bow ads are all over television, and the Nutcracker is in town. Yes, it’s already December and another holiday season is upon us. However, with the struggling economy and high unemployment, this is a time where consumers have to be careful with their holiday spending. According to the National Retail Federation, this year holiday retail sales for 2011 are expected to increase 2.8 percent to $465.6 billion.

I’m not trying to be the Certified Financial Scrooge on the “season to be jolly”, but this time of year is where people buy and spend way beyond their means. The last thing you need is to be buying Christmas gifts that you’re still paying off in July.

Here are few tips for a satisfying yet not unnecessary gift purchases.

**Buy gifts jointly.** Partner up with family or friends to be able to get a better gift. It may or may not be more expensive for you, but the joint buying power can get that gift on top of someone’s wish list.

**More toys don’t equal more love.** Kids love toys but in tough times like these, you don’t need to overload it. In a few weeks, most of those toys end up in the closet hardly ever to be seen again. My girls (they’re 8 and under) are usually just as happy with a toy from the dollar store as they are with a toy that’s $30. There’s no rule that says the more toys you buy for a child, the more you love them. In fact, the best present you can give your kids is your time with them.

**Try to cut down the impulse buying.** If it’s too hard, give up the credit card and get an iPod Nano any day (hint, hint.).

**Be creative with your gifts.** The best gifts don’t have to be the most expensive gifts. A friend gave us a collage as a gift and it really stood out. The total cost to make it was significantly lower than a bought gift, but in terms of thoughtfulness and time spent it was so much more. We really appreciated how personalized it was and the originality of it.

**Buy gifts in advance.** Take on a second job during the holiday season is a great way to help pay for some if not all of your holiday shopping. Also the realization of the hard work it takes to make some extra income may curb some of those unnecessary gift purchases.

**Redeem those frequent flier miles or credit card points for gifts for the holidays.** You can get that gift on top of someone’s wish list.

**Partner up with family or friends to be able to get a better gift.** It may or may not be more expensive for you, but the joint buying power can get that gift on top of someone’s wish list.

**Tis the season...not to overspend.** By Michael Tow CFP®

Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!
Ng in conclusion to her testimony. Among those in attendance at the hearing were a large number of members from the Chinatown Residents Association. Many association members gave their testimony, even hinting at a desire to split Chinatown from South Boston in order to create a new minority district.

“When we first saw the first draft of the map we were very concerned because in the map Chinatown was going to be split,” Co-Chair of the Chinatown Resident Association, Henry Yee said with the help of an interpreter: “In the second iteration of the map, the major areas of Chinatown are reconnected and we’re very happy to see this, but there is still a small area of the existing district that is still cut, so we’re still concerned.”

“I think it’s important that Chinatown remains together because Chinatown, as a community, has been around for over 100 years,” Yee said.

“One thing we would like to propose is for Chinatown to be grouped with other neighborhoods of color, instead of connected with South Boston,” Yee said. “The reason is because we think it is helpful and important to work with other communities of color to get the needed representation that is necessary for us.”

Much like many of those in attendance, Yee also suggested that “he would like the councilors to hear our input through more hearings and a longer process.”

Chan Dan-Sum, a resident of South Cove Neighborhood Council, said, “I understand that people think you’re going to rush into this matter, and I hope you don’t. I don’t think you should drag it out either. I think it should be a slow and deliberate process so that the city council can come to a reasonable decision on what happens.”

“I do agree, if at all possible, that we keep the neighborhoods together and keep the school districts together,” Moy said.

Moy, however, disagreed with the Yee’s proposal to split Chinatown from South Boston, hinting at the politics behind the motivation.

“I do not agree that we should have a Chinatown district together with a minority district just to set up a different minority district,” Moy said. “I think that the democratic process through the last elections prove that if you have a strong candidate, no matter where you come from, you have an opportunity to win.”

In the last of the testimonies from those affiliated with the Asian community and Chinatown, a representative from the Asian American Resource Workshop reiterated much of what had been made clear during the hearing — that the public was uneasy with the speed of the proceedings.

“We strongly feel that the redistricting process can be a great opportunity for the city to engage a wide range of stakeholders,” John Hsieh, Executive Director of the Asian American Resource Workshop, said.

“The AAWR respectfully requests that the Committee on Census and Redistricting not unnecessarily rush the city council redistricting process,” Hsieh said. “We encourage this committee to allow for broader public input as well as active community participation in the development of the redistricting map.”

In response to the concern around a perceived “rush” on behalf of Councilor Linehan and the redistricting maps proposed, Linehan ensured those in attendance, as well as the public who may have been watching the hearing on television that that was not the case.

“There has been no rush to complete or end this process,” Linehan said. “But what has happened is that there has been a deliberate movement to keep the process moving forward.”

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Gary Christenson Speaks at AACA Community Forum

Gary Christenson was a community forum speaker who expressed his views on the redistricting proposal and its implications for Chinatown. His views were based on his experience in the community and his understanding of the needs and challenges faced by residents of both Chinatown and South Boston.

One of his key points was the importance of maintaining the existing Chinatown district and keeping the community together. He argued that splitting the district would undermine the representation of the community and lead to a dilution of its political clout.

Christenson also emphasized the need for a transparent and inclusive process in redistricting, ensuring that the voices of all community members were heard. He highlighted the benefits of maintaining the current map, including the preservation of the neighborhood identity and the protection of its cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Christenson emphasized the importance of community input and the need for a fair and transparent process in redistricting. He called for a more deliberate approach, allowing sufficient time for public consultation and deliberation.

The proposed changes according to Docket #1591:

- District One loses Ward 3 Precinct 6 (0306)
- District Two loses Ward 4 Precinct 2 (0402) and Ward 7 Precinct 9
- District Three adds Ward 8 Precinct 0806, Ward 7 Precinct 10 (0710), and Ward 13 Precinct 5 (1305) but loses Ward 17 Precinct 14 (1714)
- District Four adds Ward 18 Precinct 21 (1821), Ward 13 Precinct 1 (1301), Ward 13 Precinct 4 (1304), and Ward 17 Precinct 14 (1714)
- District Five loses Ward 18 Precinct 21 (1821) but will gain Ward 20 Precinct 3 (2003)
- District Six gains Ward 10 Precinct 8 (0808), Ward 10 Precinct 4 (0804) and Ward 11 Precinct 5 (1105), but will lose Ward 20 Precinct 3 (2003)
- District Seven loses Ward 11 Precinct 5 (1105), Ward 7 Precinct 10 (0710), Ward 13 Precinct 1 (1301), Ward 13 Precinct 4 (1304), and Ward 13 Precinct 5 (1305), District seven will pick up Ward 4 Precinct 2 (0402) and Ward 4 Precinct 7 (0407)
- District Eight loses Ward 10 Precinct 8 (0808), Ward 10 Precinct 4 (0804), and Ward 4 Precinct 7 (0407) but will gain Ward 3 Precinct 6 (0306)
- District Nine stays the same
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**MYTH:** I don’t need an agent. I can save money by selling my own home and have less hassle. It will be a win-win for me.

**FACT:** Statistics show sellers who used a real estate professional sold their homes for 25% more than the list price, while For Sale By Owners, more commonly known as “FSBO” (pronounced “Fizzle”) sold theirs for less.

It can’t be that hard. If I can sell my own car, I can sell my own home. Becoming a real estate agent is simple – take the class and pass the license exam, right? GET REAL! The reality of being an agent is about BROKERING a deal. One aspect involves finding and qualifying prospective buyers, dealing with other agents, lenders, lawyers, and title companies. The other aspect involves pricing the property competitively, staging and marketing the home, organizing showings, and hosting open houses. Not to mention all the paperwork, legal documents, and writing your own contracts, offers, and counter-offers. Is your head spinning yet?

The foremost reason why selling your home on your own may not be practical is FSBO sellers are not permitted to put their homes in the multiple listing service (MLS), thus limiting their exposure to prospective buyers. Another reason is agents representing buyers are leery of showing FSBO homes to their clients because they do not want to waste their time with inexperienced sellers, thus further limiting the market of prospective buyers. What remains are unrepresented, and most likely unqualified buyers.

Don’t sell yourself short by not having an experienced professional guide you through the ins and outs of selling your home. Inexperience and lack of exposure can cost you tens of thousands of dollars – far more than what you think you can save by selling your home on your own. Without the guidance of an agent, you will have to navigate through these obstacles alone.

I know my home best, and that makes me the most qualified. GET REAL! You may know your house best, but you have no idea about the other houses on the market, or their condition and price. Also, how do you know that people looking at your home are actually prospective buyers and not just nosy neighbors checking to see what their homes could be worth? When it’s business, sometimes it is better to have an objective guide. An agent will be an emotional BUFFER between you and buyers to negotiate the best sale price, handle the many players and different personalities, manage inspections, and complete the necessary documents to secure the sale and ensure a successful closing.

Even the gurus need professional help. Col. Sammybrotto, founder of ForSaleByOwner.com, a website dedicated to helping home-owners sell their own homes, caved in and used the help of a real estate broker to sell his 2,000 square-foot two-bedroom New York City apartment. And he paid the standard 6% commission!

Finding the right professional agent for you may take some work, but it is nothing compared to the work of doing everything yourself. Further, less than 30% of sellers who try to sell their own homes actually accomplish the task, even in a robust market, meaning that 70% of sellers will eventually enlist the services of a real estate professional. Do it right the first time and avoid costly headaches.

**CALL TO READERS:** In the process of buying or selling and have questions? Call or email and your topic could be the next discussion. Mildred Wong is a Licensed Real Estate Agent at City Central Realty, LLC. She can be reached at 677-2360-2060 or mil-dred@citycentralrealty.com. Follow her on Twitter: @GetRealMildred.

**New Column**

Samuel Tsoi’s
**INalienable Rights**

They Make Our Jobs

“They are taking our jobs!” That was a common refrain at the turn of the 20th century in the American West about the influx of Chinese laborers, which coalesced into the nation’s first and most blatant race-based anti-immigrant law: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Last week, the US Senate celebrated the passage of a resolution to formally acknowledge and express regret for the discriminatory legislation. The law effectively made all Chinese settlers illegal for over 60 years, and barred access to citizenship and property rights. It was not overturned until it became politically expedient to pit Chinese allies against the Japanese Empire circa World War II.

Our immigration policy has evolved ever since, for the better, as America has become a scientific, creative and entrepreneurial powerhouse. However, the memory of “paper sons,” the fear mongering images of immigrants from China, Ireland and the Jewish Diaspora as parasites devouring their country and price. It was not over.
They Make Our Jobs

America, still makes us all ashamed today. The regret is compounded with the enduring legacy of the Trans-Continental Railroad and of our great cities, built by those very immigrants.

Eerily, but to no one’s surprise, we are hearing the immigrants-hurt-our-economy cry again. This whole fear has translated into anti-immigrant laws enacted in places like Arizona and Alabama, which are driving migrant labor away from the very same industries necessary for a strong recovery. For decades, our current immigration system has been in desperate need to catch up with a newly globalized world. The system is not only backlogged, but it is deporting aspiring students and separating families. Our immigration laws are in conflict with our labor needs, allowing unscrupulous employers to exploit workers, and failing to provide legal and realistic means to welcome skilled and high-skilled immigrants alike.

In this age of austerity, unemployment and debt, we need to acknowledge the economic bedrock that immigrants provide; and the dreams, work-ethic and determination that define American optimism. It is encouraging to see Congresswoman Judy Chu (D-CA), whose career embodies the full incorporation of immigrants and Senator Scott Brown (R-MA), the “no amnesty” legislator, lead the long overdue effort to acknowledge a painful chapter in this nation of immigrants. It is all the more urgent for both parties in Washington to act on immigration reform, reform that will squarely learn from the lessons of 1882 and subsequent periods of tough economic times, which immigrants, natives, and all communities united to overcome — and will again.

Samuel Tsoi is a Policy Associate at the Mass. Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition

New York City is a mecca of good eats and a hub for a wide range of cuisines from all around the world. Recently while in Manhattan’s East Side in search of a new defunct ramen shop, we stumbled upon ‘Amma’.

We thanked our lucky stars we went there and though our wallets were a bit lighter it was worth it. Amma (or mother) is a 40-seat, upscale Pan Indian restaurant with ochre splashed walls and lovely antique decorations located on 246 East 51st Street [between 2nd and 3rd] New York, NY 10022 (212) 644-8330. One of the owners, Anju Sharma, wanted a relaxed and cozy atmosphere while serving food reminiscent of what her mom would make. ‘Amma’ is her homage to her mother and mother-in-law’s great cooking with a twist fit for a restaurant.

To start our meal, an amuse bouche (literally amusement for the mouth aka small bite of food) of fried lentil fritters came out courtesy of the chef. They were small, compact triangles that were not overcooked but their flavors were far more accentuated by the same two accompaniments. The paneer (a simple fresh cheese made of milk & curd) was cooked in the tandoor (cylindrical clay oven) after being marinated with aromatic spices and yogurt. It was simple but delicious, and it’s texture reminded me of fresh mozzarella but the mild cheese complemented the lovely spices and yogurt. The samosas (stuffed pastry and a popular snack) were stuffed with potato, lentil and paneer. The chutney sauces enhanced these vegetarian choosing with a twist fit for a restaurant.

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The Stoneham Housing Authority is seeking a permanent full-time (40 hours/week) Maintenance Person and a temporary part-time (18 hours/week) Maintenance Person. Applicants must be able to perform a wide range of exterior/interior maintenance of property, including some skilled work not requiring a license: minor electrical, painting, plumbing, mechanical, carpentry, grounds maintenance, snow removal, and general custodial duties. Applicants must have experience using power and hand tools, be able to climb ladders and lift heavy items. Applicants must be available to provide periodic on-call night and weekend coverage for maintenance emergencies.

The applicant must have at least a high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate, be in good general health, possess a valid Massachusetts driver’s license, and satisfactorily pass a wellness physical (including drug/alcohol screening), be bondable and CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) screened successfully. Salary is dependent upon experience and the Authority provides an excellent benefit package.

A full job description is available for pick-up at the office listed below.

Interested persons must send a resume including employment history and three recent references no later than 12 Noon on January 4, 2012 to:

Stoneham Housing Authority, 11 Parker Chase Road Stoneham, MA 02180 Attention: Maintenance Position.

Equal Opportunity Employer

Goan region curry that utilizes fresh and dry coconut, chilies, white poppy seeds along with other spices and it is usually cooked with chicken or lamb. Easily our spiciest dish of the night, but still the coconut and Indian spices melded well together in this dish.

Indian food tends to be served in smaller portions, but they are rather filling due to the rich sauces. Our final entree selection was recommended to us by our server. He suggested the ubiquitous Chicken Tikka Masala ($18) or Butter Chicken on their menu. Definitely an influence from the time Britain colonized India, Chicken Tikka Masala was created specifically for the British palate. In fact in Britain, Chicken Tikka Masala was hailed by former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook to be “a true British national dish.” There are many variations of this colored dish but there is always the masala (mixture of spices), cream and tomatoes combined with the tandoori baked, spices and yogurt marinated chicken. A survey found there were at least 48 different recipes for this one dish! For us, by far the BEST sauce of all the dishes! When we heard this dish initially suggested to us, we were a bit apprehensive. The velvety creamy sauce coupled with the spices and tomatoes complimented each other well. We ordered more Onion Kulch that has 4 pieces per order ($6) [a Punjabi bread baked in the tandoor oven and it is similar to Naan] and rice to make sure we did not miss any of the sauces.

Regrettably, we had to pass on dessert after eating such a wonderful meal. It is my experience that a person either really falls in love or avoids Indian food. Fortunately, one person at our table never had Indian food before and became smitten with the flavors, spicy and creamy sauces. Also note that the restaurant offers a five course regular and vegetarian tasting menu as an alternative for $50 or paired with wine for $85.

Our servers were knowledgeable, courteous, and helpful. We are still dreaming about wanting more of that great chicken tikka masala! My New York buddy has now added this restaurant as a must go to place on her list. For a night of fine Indian food dining, be sure to check them out when in New York City.
Advocates for the poor across New England are calling on Congress to act immediately to maintain federal fuel assistance funding at the $4.7 billion level provided last year.

The need to bolster current funding is urgent, with 17,000 ABCD fuel aid clients expected to use up their benefits by Christmas Day. Right now the highest benefit level for the poorest families is $675. At current prices, that provides only about two-thirds of a tank of oil, enough to get through two to three weeks of cold weather. Last year the top benefit was $1,050 and the price of heating oil was significantly lower.

Congressional leaders are introducing the LIHEAP Protection Act to keep funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program at last year’s $4.7 billion level nationally. But they face a tough fight in a Congress bent on deficit reduction at all costs. So far the government has provided only $1.7 billion in LIHEAP funding.

In a recent Associated Press article, ABCD President/CEO John J. Drew called for immediate increased LIHEAP funding and accused the federal government of playing Russian roulette with people’s lives. “We have a lot of terrified people who can’t see how they are going to survive,” he said. Drew said that given high unemployment rates, the dire economic straits of increasing numbers of Americans, increased heating costs and the surge in fuel assistance applications, “...fuel assistance must be funded at the highest possible level to prevent a natural disaster on par with the hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and forest fires that have descended on the nation this past year. That natural disaster is just not enough household income to pay for the bare necessities,” he said. “Increasingly, people are forced to choose between heat, food, medicine and paying their rent.”

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Increase In Veterans Served By LIHEAP

A recent survey by the National Energy Association Directors’ Association showed that the number of military families receiving fuel assistance has increased 150 percent since 2008, from 695, 760 in 2008 to 1.79 million in 2011. Veteran households account for almost 35 percent of total growth in the fuel assistance program. Twelve percent of all veterans receiving LIHEAP have served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

ABCD currently has 17,000 fuel applications – up about 10 percent from this time last year. The program expects to process more than 24,000 by winter’s end. More than one third of heating aid recipients are seniors.

The ABCD Fuel Assistance program serves Boston, Brookline and Newton. Families eligible for fuel assistance are also eligible for utility discounts, weatherization, and heating system replacements.

The following information was obtained from an ABCD Press Release

17,000 ABCD Fuel Aid Families Out of Benefits by Dec. 25
Advocates Call on Congress to Keep Funding at Last Year’s Level
Mr. H was a smoker of 30 years before he had a stroke four years ago. The stroke left him paralyzed on the left side of his body and severely affected his eye-sight. As a result of the stroke, Mr. H was comatose for 22 days, during his doctor had even decided to pull life support. Fortunately, Mr. H recovered, but still carries with him the baggage and disabilities the stroke inflicted.

Nowadays, Mr. H struggles to walk for long periods of time, as walking in itself is difficult and he tires easily. Mr. H also can not lift heavy objects, and his poor eyesight cannot be remedied by a pair of glasses.

“Smoking affects all of your blood vessels,” said Gert Healey-Dame, System Director of Respiratory Care for Hallmark Health System. Smokers are prone to arterial scle- rosis, a condition that weakens the walls of the arteries and increases plaque along the walls of the arteries, narrowing the arteries, which may very well have been the cause of Mr. H’s stroke.

Smoking and the link to Diabetes and Obesity

Despite acknowledging that the link between smoking and diabetes is still “fuzzy” and needs to be studied more, Healey-Dame noted that “quitting smoking is the best thing for someone with diabetes to do.”

“People who smoke tend to also have unhealthy lifestyles,” Healey-Dame said. “If you have diabetes you really should stop smoking as the risk of cardiovascular dis- ease increases dramatically.”

The link between stopping smok- ing and gaining weight, Healey-Dame ac- ceptsthat“nicotine increases your metabolic rate, but not so much if you’re obese.” There- fore, the notion that one can use smoking to lose weight once they’re obese is flawed.

“The best thing you can do is [quit smoking]” Healey-Dame said in conclusion.

The Asian Health Initiative Programs Boston Asian Youth Essential Services

A new program, “Teens Going Healthy”, helps teens adopt a healthy lifestyle, which includes healthy food choices and regular exercise. Nutrition and wellness work- shops and physical activities will be offered for both individuals and groups.

Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center

A Family Services program focused on educational workshops for parents to reduce and/or prevent childhood diabetes and obesity in Boston’s growing Asian im- migrant community. Other program activi- ties include children’s fitness workshops, family counseling and referrals services.

Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center

A new program “Understanding Dia- betes” for Chinese speaking seniors ages 55 years and older who have been diagnosed as having diabetes or who are at high-risk for developing diabetes. Program goals in- clude helping seniors to take control of their diabetes and mitigating the consequences associated with diabetes.

Wang YMCA of Chinatown

A new program, “TEEN E-BALANCE” (Early Beginning Active Lifestyle & Appropriate Nutritional Choices Education), helps area teens to learn about obesity and the health risks and consequences of an unhealthy lifestyle and helps teens develop the knowledge and skills to make healthy choices for a lifetime.

You're Hurting More Than Yourself

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Qigong was originally practiced as a complement to other martial arts, such as tai chi or kung fu, but its main attraction to students today is its power to heal. Rather than reaching for the ibuprofen, qigong offers an alternative, natural solution to aches and pains—both physical and mental.

Although scientific studies on the benefits of qigong are inconclusive, the personal testimonials of Wong Sifu’s students make convincing arguments. Each of the students had their own reasons for practicing qigong—from thyroid issues, to leg pain, to general malaise—but they all found relief through their weekly practice of qigong and, specifically, from the healing power of Wong Sifu. One student remarked, “Qigong helps us with discomfort. [Wong Sifu] helps us to help ourselves.”

Wong Sifu added, “The main thing is people are getting healthier.”

Americans are perpetually bombarded with information about our health and well-being. We know the dangers of obesity and smoking and we are aware of the benefits of a good diet and exercise. But when was the last time you assessed the status of your qi?

Qi, or life energy, is not something that will show up on the bathroom scale or on a nutrition label. The classification of qi is hard to pin down, but it is essentially an internal, flowing energy, which can be heightened or hindered by the way we treat our bodies. Traditional Chinese medicinal and martial arts practices believe that qi is the fundamental component to health and longevity.

These principles assert that illness is caused by blocked or unbalanced qi and can be alleviated by rebalancing the flow of qi. The good news is, harnessing the power of your qi is easy! Or at least, it’s a lot easier than training for a marathon or exercising restraint when faced with the plethora of baked goods accompanying the holidays.

Last Sunday, I participated in Donald Wong’s qigong class, held at the Nam Pai Academy in Chinatown. The practice of qigong focuses on slow, controlled breathing combined with various postures and with an emphasis on mindfulness. Mr. Wong is a state representative for the Massachusetts House of Representatives, but to his students, his is known simply as Wong Sifu. Mr. Wong whole-heartedly believes in the power of qi to relieve, and even cure, illnesses.

“We open up blockage. Where qi can go, blood will follow,” said Wong, pointing to the health benefits of improved circulation.

I joined his small but dedicated class of qigong students in an effort to learn how to tap into my inner qi. In practical terms, the class was an hour of standing still, breathing, and occasionally changing postures, which is much more difficult than it sounds! I lost track of the number of times Wong Sifu instructed me to relax. Who knew it was possible to be bad at breathing and standing?

It took about twenty minutes of one-on-one attention before I could genuinely relax and just let my qi flow. The result was a relaxing and stress-reducing exercise, which left me feeling refreshed and happy.