Malden Mayor Gary Christenson submits 2014 budget proposal

BY ANNA TSE

Mayor Gary Christenson submitted Malden’s proposed budget for fiscal year 2014 to the city council for its review and consideration on May 29.

Christenson and Charles Ranaghan, city controller, discussed the proposed budget, which takes effect July 1. It has an increase of 5 percent from the 2013 fiscal year.

The Veterans’ Services Department fared well with a proposed increase of nearly 5 percent for medical assistance and fuel assistance. Christenson stressed the importance of providing veterans care that they served the nation. Funding was also increased to the Senior Center by nearly 10 percent. The budget plan also maintained 7.5 percent of Malden’s annual operating in reserves.

Budget priorities include crime prevention, education, and senior and veteran services. The budget also proposed relocating City Hall to reconnect Pleasant Street and the revitalized Malden downtown area. Christenson hoped to attract new investment to the city.

New revenue will be generated from parking garage income.

Highlights of the proposed budget:
- Malden Police Department: Increase staffing levels to 84 police officers, adding nine patrol officers. Also proposed is a new position of deputy chief. Enlisting the intervention services of ROCA is recommended to work with at-risk youth. The budget proposed expanding video surveillance technology for crime monitoring.
- Department of Public Works: For this department, the proposal would add three more employees while supplementing the department’s staffing levels through other means. Also, the maintenance of a bike path will be funded from its account.
- Permits, Inspections and Planning Services: Christenson recommended one more building inspector, due to the

Malden City Hall. (Image by Anna Tse.)

in increases in inspections and building permits in Malden.

Emergency Management Department: Christenson proposed restructuring the department to include more members with a wider range of expertise while producing a net savings to the overall budget. A focus will be on emergency planning for schools following the tragedy in Newtown, Conn.

Engineering Department: Transferring the Geographical Information System Coordinator from the Information Technology Department to the Engineering Department and funding the position.

School Department: The proposal met the Fiscal Year 2014 minimum funding contribution as determined by the state. Because the city is below the required net school spending requirement, Chapter 70 school aid could be at risk. The recommendation is to transfer the funding for the custodians and Partnership for Community Schools to the school budget, as they report to the Superintendent.

Finally, the budget proposed the reauthorization of a bond issued in 2010 for the expansion of the Forest Dale Cemetery, redirecting the remaining funds of about $1 million to security upgrades and capital repairs for schools.

For more on the Malden budget proposal, please visit www.sampan.org.

South Cove Manor celebrates ‘topping-off’ of Quincy Point facility

BY LING-MEI WONG

South Cove Manor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center held a “topping-off” ceremony on June 4 at the site of its Quincy facility at 288 Washington Street. Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch, City Councilor Margaret LaForest and State Rep. Tackey Chan attended the event, along with roughly 30 guests and staff members. The final steel beam of the structure was placed on top of the building, after it was signed.

“We have a pine tree on the beam to symbolize the building’s and residents’ safety,” said Richard Liu, chairman of the South Cove Manor board. He also thanked the community for their support and partnership.

The new facility is expected to open by spring 2014. It will have 141 rooms clustered in communities of 14 to 18

South Cove Manor celebrated the ‘topping-off’ of its Quincy facility June 4. (Left to right) Paul Chan; Bill Chin; Josephine Chin; Jason Qu; Helen Chin Silichica; State Rep. Tackey Chan; Mayor Thomas Koch; City Councilor Margaret LaForest; Dick Wong; and Richard Liu. (Image by Ling-Mei Wong)

residents. Amenities include rehabilitation center, common activity areas and indoor courtyard.

Koch thanked the center’s progress to the song “Climb Ev’ry Moun’tain” from “The Sound of Music.”

“The last line is ‘I’ll find your dream’ and today our dream is closer to reality,” Koch said. “It’s a tremendous improvement to Washington Street. People who live in Quincy are happy about a shorter commute to their workplace. I love seeing cranes building Quincy Center and new construction sites like this.”
“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

— Anne Frank
Event Calendar

Community Conversations: Edward Markey Friday, June 7 5:30 - 7 p.m. BCNC 38 Ash Street Boston, MA 02111

Gov. Deval Patrick’s Asian American Commission/Advisory Council and the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center present Community Conversations, inviting U.S. Congressman Edward Markey to speak. Light refreshments will be served. RSVP at (617) 635-5129 or visit www.bcnc.net.

Dragon Boat Festival Saturday, June 8 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. MIT Pierce Boathouse 409 Memorial Drive Cambridge, MA 02139 Saturday, June 8 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Charles River near Harvard The 34th Annual Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival will include races and cultural events. For more information, please visit www.bostondragonboat.org.

Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras: Intensive Community Program Graduation Recital 2013 Saturday, June 8 4 p.m. Roxbury Community College, Media Arts Building 1224 Columbus Avenue Roxbury Crossing, MA 02120

The concert will be featuring Intensive Community Program graduates Alyssa Lujares, viola, and Patrick Samonte, viola, First Year and Pre-YPSO ensembles, ICP Festival Orchestra and members of ICP faculty. This event is free and open to the public.

For more information, please contact icp@bu.edu or visit www.lysoweb.org/pages/19_intensive_community_program.cfm.

Anne Frank Sapling Project Wednesday, June 12 3 p.m. Central Library 700 Boylston Street Boston, MA 02116

On Anne Frank’s birthday, there will be a discussion group in the Teen Room. The Teen Book of the Month Club has selected “Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl” for this month’s discussion in honor of her birthday and the planting of the Anne Frank sapling on the Boston Common.

Kwong Kong Chinese School Graduation Saturday, June 15 3 p.m. 87 Tyler Street Boston, MA 02110

The Kwong Kong Chinese School will hold its graduation ceremony for the Class of 2013.

RSVP at (617) 426-6716 or kwongkow@gmail.com.

Wollaston Senior Center 6th Elder Awareness Community Fair Friday, June 21 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. 440 E. Squantum Street Quincy, MA 02171

Wollaston Senior Center is having its 6th Elder Awareness Community Fair and invites the public to come and to learn more about older care and other health issues. There will be Q&A sessions and a free health examination. The fair is free and light refreshments will be served.

Contact: (617) 471-9354

First-time home buyer class June 22 - June 23 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. (Sat), 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. (Sun) Quincy Community Action Programs 4F, 1509 Hancock Street Quincy, MA 02169

Asian Community Development Corporation will hold its first-time home buyer class. With the completion of the two-day class, students will get their first-time home buyer certificate, which is issued by the government and will be valid for three years. Middle- or low-income residents can apply for affordable housing with this certificate, and enjoy benefits such as loans and low prepay, which can be 3 percent of the house price. Class fee is $40.

Contact: (617) 482-2380 or 208 at 207, or CHOPs@asiancdc.org.

Youth concert with Boson Landmarks Orchestra Wednesday, Jul. 24 7 p.m. Department of Recreation and Recreation’s Hatch Shell 47 David G Mugar Way Boston, MA 02108

More than 1,000 youngsters from area public, charter and parochial schools will perform with the professional musicians of the Boston Landmarks Orchestra. A highlight was a newly commissioned work by Grammy-nominated composer, Michael Gandolfi. The program will be free.

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Comics

 emptyclothing.jpg

Copyright © 2013 AACA
Chinatown history reflects community advocacy efforts

BY HAO LU

The “Community Responses to a Changing Chinatown, 1940-2000” talk took place June 1 at the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center conference room, organized by the Chinese Historical Society of New England and BCNC. Thomas Chen, lecturer in American studies at Tufts University, and Michael Liu, senior research associate at the Institute for Asian American Studies, Tufts University, and Michael Liu (left) and Thomas Chen discussed the Chinatown community after urban renewal from his dissertation, “Remaking Boston’s Chinatown: Race, Place, and Redevelopment After World War II.”

Before 1950s, the Chinatown community was basically ignored by the official urban planners. However, with the neighborhood engaging in urban renewal, Chinatown gradually became a business and commercial center.

Chen focused on the building and developing of Chinese Merchants Association. Since the Merchants Association lacked the power and resources of city planners, it came up with its own design for urbanization, trying to attract new customers to local businesses, Chen said.

Central to their plan was the construction of the new Merchants Association. As a doctoral candidate in American studies at Brown University, Chen discussed the Chinatown community after urban renewal from his dissertation, “Remaking Boston’s Chinatown: Race, Place, and Redevelopment After World War II.”

“The site will have two buildings, with 95 affordable rental units, 217 market rate rental condos in one building and 50 affordable home ownership units in the other. Construction completion is slated for July 2015. ACDC seeks funding to offset the remaining cost for the second building,” Liu said.

Along with the two speeches, CHSNE brought historical artwork and photos to the event, illustrating the life of Boston’s Chinese immigrants.

Chinatown meeting roundup: CCBA, CRA and CSC

BY LING-MEI WONG

The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of New England met for its bimonthly meeting on May 28 at 90 Tyler Street. CCBA President Rick Wong plans to form a street-cleaning team to clean Chinatown, using Winn Management’s annual $3,000 donation. The donation was intended for the Mount Hope Cemetery, but the site is managed by the City of Boston with the Chinese Historical Society of New England.

The CCBA had a presentation from the Asian Community Development Corporation on Parcel 24. The triangular site is bordered by Kneeland, Hudson and Albany streets. It used to have Chinese tenements housing hundreds of families, which were torn down for the Mass Pike in the 1960s.

“We have in mind two buildings, with 95 affordable rental units, 217 market rate rental condos in one building and 50 affordable home ownership units in the other. Construction completion is slated for July 2015. ACDC seeks funding to offset the remaining cost for the second building,” Liu said.

Liu discussed the relationship between Chinatown and Boston’s African-American community. He talked about how young Asian Americans overcame differences with African Americans over competition for construction jobs in the 1960s. He emphasized the Mel King mayoral campaign in 1980s, which was significant in building Asian-American and African-American relations.

“There was a community group called ‘Asians for Mel King,’ and they were a part of the campaign organization, alongside Jamaica Plain, alongside the Fenway, alongside gays and lesbians, and so on,” Liu said.

Along with the two speeches, CHSNE brought historical artwork and photos to the event, illustrating the life of Boston’s Chinese immigrants.

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The Chinatown Safety Committee celebrates First Ladies Spring Concert

SUBMITTED BY THE BOSTON RENAISSANCE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

The Boston Renaissance Charter Public School hosted its annual First Ladies breakfast on May 23 at the school’s auditorium at 1415 Hyde Park Avenue, Hyde Park. The purpose of the breakfast was to invest in future generations and to create a forum for young girls in grades 3 through 6 to discuss issues critically important to them.

The Boston Renaissance Charter Public School is an urban K-6 school committed to providing a vibrant educational experience for Boston’s children. The school strives to nurture and develop children academically, socially and emotionally. It offers a Mandarin program for young girls in grades 3 through 6 to discuss issues critically important to them.

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Chinese-American author Anchee Min (right) and Suffolk University associate professor of English Elif Armbruster discuss Min’s book, “The Cooked Seed” on May 23 at Suffolk University. (Image courtesy of Douglas Yu.)

Chinese-American author Anchee Min (left) discusses overcoming hardship.

By Elif Armbruster

“The Chinese-American Dream,” featuring acclaimed author Anchee Min, took place May 23 as part of the Ford Hall Forum at Suffolk University. Elif Armbruster, associate professor of English at Suffolk University, hosted the presentation. Min talked about her book “The Cooked Seed,” based on her traumatic memories of the Cultural Revolution, arriving in America and having her first child.

When a seed is cooked, it doesn’t sprout. People can hardly grow in a land where they are repressed, have their hands tied behind their backs and are forced to keep their mouths shut.

Min came to the United States in 1980s with a help of a friend. When she first arrived, she could barely put two words together in English.

Min said that she did not know America well enough to make any judgments in her first few years. When asked what made her to wait 30 years to commit her memories to paper, she said, “I’m haunted by my past. After all these years, I think it’s enough for me to judge America.”

As a saying goes, distance creates beauty. Min repurposed her dark memories to paper, she said, “I’m so lonely on Christmas, Thanksgiving. But there was nobody that I could talk to.”

Min also talked about her daughter, as she did not want a girl. “I don’t want my daughter to mirror my life. When she was 16 years old, my daughter said to me, ‘I feel broken inside,’” Min said.

Min recalled how her daughter envied her inner-city peers at grade school and complained why she did not have stuffed animals, her own room and a computer. “My daughter would say, ‘Mom, I just want a normal American childhood.’”

Min said her book is banned in China. As a saying goes, distance creates beauty. Min repurposed her dark memories to paper, she said, “I’m so lonely on Christmas, Thanksgiving. But there was nobody that I could talk to.”

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Min said her book is banned in China, but she appreciates how American society values everyone as a human. America gave Min and her daughter the confidence to right the wrongs in their lives.

Min endured rape, poverty and loneliness for years after she arrived in the United States. “I was working at a porn video store and those videos were my boyfriends for many years,” Min said. “I was so lonely on Christmas, Thanksgiving. But there was nobody that I could talk to.”

The first State of Asian Women’s Health in Massachusetts conference took place May 29 at the Federal Reserve. About 150 community advocates, health care providers and policy makers gathered to discuss health issues affecting Asian-American women in the state.

“Asian women are the backbone of community,” said Chien-Chih Huang, executive director of Asian Women for Health and organizer of the event. “We are the glue that holds families together. But we are also most likely to be uninsured.”

Christina Chan, chairwoman of Gov. Deval Patrick’s Asian American Commission, presented a citation to Huang.

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Christina Chan, chairwoman of Gov. Deval Patrick’s Asian American Commission, presented a citation to Huang. Chris Chanyasulkit, commissioner for the Mass. Asian American Commission and Mass. Commission on the Status of Women, spoke about her experience growing up as a Thai Chinese immigrant. “Unfortunately, I know firsthand what discrimination and racism are like,” she said. “I had a family member commit suicide, so I know mental health issues exist. But many still face racism and the stereotype of a model minority. It affects the health care they receive or don’t receive.”

While Asians make up just 6 percent of the state’s population, they are the fastest growing minority and different communities face unique risks. For example, South Asian women face a high risk of gestational diabetes, but Chinese women are different, said Greeshama Shetty, staff clinician at the Joslin Diabetes Center.

The first of two panel discussions allowed audience members to ask the four health care experts to respond. The second panel discussion looked at education and destigmatizing health issues in the Asian community.

“Bostons faced a tragedy, but some tragedies in the Asian community far exceed what we experienced,” said Marilyn Gardner, clinical liaison at the Mass. Department of Public Health, who grew up in Pakistan. “So many people talk about cultural competency, which goes deeper than ethnicity and skin color. We need to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries.”
Pikaichi dishes out soupy ramen goodness

BY LING-MEI WONG

Pikaichi sticks to a simple but tasty menu of ramen, curry and donburi. Tucked away in Allston’s Super 88 Supermarket, it serves up Japanese comfort food in generous portions.

For appetizers, its six-piece takoyaki or fried octopus balls ($5.49) are consistently crispy on the outside, filled with chunks of chewy octopus inside. Drizzled with thick tonkatsu sauce and Kewpie mayonnaise on the side, the octopus balls disappear quickly.

Pikaichi offers seasonal specials, such as the fiery jigoku ramen ($8.49) or “hell noodles” packing extra heat for cooler days. This is actually more enjoyable than the spicy miso ramen ($8.99) on the regular menu, with less salt and more flavor from the hot shrimp oil. Both of the spicy ramen dishes include shrimp oil, pork slices and nori, while the jigoku ramen leaves out corn. The broth is clearer for the jigoku ramen, allowing the noodles to bathe in the gloriously hot oil without numbing the tongue. It’s intensely aromatic and hits the spot during Boston’s long winters.

For summer, Pikaichi has four cold ramen options: yuzu ($8.49), pika ($8.49), spicy yuzu ($8.99) and tofu ($8.99). The cold noodles are available until Aug. 31.

All ramen dishes are served with six ounces of noodles rather than the standard five and can be ordered with less salt. Adding half a boiled egg for 75 cents or a whole one for $1.50 will guarantee a filling and delicious meal — the yolk is slightly underdone and oh-so creamy.

The yuzu shio ramen ($8.49) has a citrusy scent from the yuzu salt, but a relatively bland taste. It comes with sliced pork, nori, corn and wakame seaweed.

Curry rice plates can be served regular, medium hot or hot. The regular curry plate ($7.49) comes with plenty of rice, but not much meat or distinct flavor. For the most part, Pikaichi’s curry and donburi plates can be skipped. They’re not bad. But you’ll be back to slurp up toothsome noodles in intensely rich broth. At Pikaichi, ramen is where it’s at.

Jigoku ramen at Pikaichi. (Image by Ling-Mei Wong)

The third “Short Waves: Stories Shaping Our Community” screening of short films took place May 30 at the Castle Square Tenants Organization, 464 Tremont Street. A total of 15 films were screened to celebrate Asian American Heritage Month in May.

Four of the 15 submissions were selected by a panel of four judges for a public vote; the winner was “Color Theory” by Minhee Shim. Shim’s documentary of her 33-day cross-country road trip with her boyfriend Danny will be entered in the Boston Asian American Film Festival on Oct. 24 to 27. Its theme of driving as the “modern day dream” combines breathtaking vistas with stills and performances from Shim.

“Asian Women for Health” by Chien-Chi Huang focused on the group’s advocacy work. “Asian women from 15 to 24 have the highest suicide rate,” she said. “Women put others’ needs ahead of themselves and need to take care of themselves.”

Four of the short films were projects for the University of Massachusetts, Boston’s Asian American Media Literacy 207 course for its Asian American Studies program. They included “Finding the Fierce Guyanese Within” by Hung An nguyenv on coming out as a gay Viet name as e man; “The Knots of My Shoes” by cerebral palsy sufferer Mary Ouk; “My Promise” by Chitowntown resident Allyson Yee about her father Daniel Moon’s hearing loss; and “Unlocking Memories” by Thary Lim on her struggles as a Cambodian-American immigrant.

First-time director SingYing Chang made “Outside and Invisible” with Xian Zhang about her experience of alienation and loneliness as an international graduate student at Tufts University. “We’re not filmmakers,” Zhang said. “We are just sensitive to cultural and ethnic topics. Working in Chinatown with immigrant parents, we shared similar experiences with language barriers.”

Participants at the “Short Waves” screening May 30 included (left to right) Susan Chirsen, Michael Sun, Cynthia Yee, Chien-Chi Kaung, Sing Ying Chung, Xian Zhang, Hung Nguyen, Henry Ho, Minnae Shim, Mary Ouk, Thary Lim, Allyson Yee and Connie Chan. (Image by Ling-Mei Wong)

Other submissions were more light-hearted. Michael Sun’s “Pest in the Kitchen” showed how a squirrel rather than mice was nibbling at his food.

“White Washed” by Aaron Wong juxtaposed “expected” Asian behavior with “reality.” Zachary Wong modeled Asian behaviors, such as playing “Fur Elise” on the piano, followed by “reality” shots of him vigorously playing video games.

“I can relate to every film shown to night,” Huang said. “I’m from Taiwan and was an international student. I experienced racial discrimination, which was a shock coming from a homogeneous country. I was diagnosed with breast cancer, which turned my life upside down. Every film here has to do with trauma and mental illness. … I’m proud to be among these young people.”

The event was organized by the University of Massachusetts student chapter of the Asian American Film Festival, the Boston Asian American Resource Workshop and the Castle Square Tenants Organization.

To watch all submissions from the screening, please visit www.baaff.org

‘Short Waves’ showcases Asian-American short films

BY LING-MEI WONG

The event was organized by the University of Massachusetts student chapter of the Asian American Film Festival, the Boston Asian American Resource Workshop and the Castle Square Tenants Organization.

To watch all submissions from the screening, please visit www.baaff.org

Pikaichi

1 Brighton Avenue
Allston, MA 02134
(617) 789-4818

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BY LING-MEI WONG

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Jigoku ramen at Pikaichi. (Image by Ling-Mei Wong)

We bring your retirement plans to life!

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How to become an alternative medicine practitioner

BY LING-MEI WONG

As a child, Sarah Wong had a stomach ache almost every day for 10 years. They finally stopped after Wong visited a Chinese medical practitioner, who prescribed a week of bitter herbal medicine.

“Afterwards, my stomach aches decreased significantly to only once every month,” she said. “Another experience that made me choose this path was that I had sprained my back and the pain had gotten better for two weeks, until I tried acupuncture and the pain was 90 percent better after just 30 minutes of treatment. … It made a huge difference in my life and I wanted other people to benefit from this as well.”

The New England School of Acupuncture offers a graduate program covering acupuncture and herbal medicine. (Image courtesy of NESA.)

Wong works as a licensed acupuncturist and herbalist, after earning a graduate degree from the New England School of Acupuncture in August 2012 and getting licensed in September 2012. About 50 to 70 students enroll each year in the three-year program, said Bing Yang, licensed acupuncturist and department chair of Chinese herbal medicine at NESA.

The curriculum for traditional Chinese medicine covers acupuncture and herbal medicine. Other Chinese medical techniques are taught: cupping, gua sha, moxibustion, tui na, medical qi gong and tai chi exercise. Students also learn Western nutrition, orthopedics, anatomy, pharmacology and pathophysiology.

“At NESA, I completed the intensive program in three years for acupuncture and herbal medicine, but some people typically can take up to six years if they are part-time students,” Wong said. “Training at NESA starts with a lot of lectures, reading, memorization and many hands-on practical labs, which eventually turn into diagnosis, treatment strategies and clinical rotations in other clinics and hospitals. … The school does an excellent job of preparing the students to feel ready to leave the school and be able to start practicing on their own.”

Practicing Chinese medicine in Massachusetts requires an acupuncture license, Yang said. To be licensed, would-be practitioners need to pass the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine board examination for acupuncturists and herbalists.

The path to becoming a traditional medical practitioner is challenging, but a satisfying one. “Treating patients in this field is definitely very rewarding experience,” Wong said.

The New England School of Acupuncture offers a graduate program covering acupuncture and herbal medicine. (Image courtesy of NESA.)

Move it or lose it: 5 moves to put seniors back in the game

SUBMITTED BY KAREN PETERSON, DIRECTOR OF GIVING BACK

For Americans 65 and older, falling down can be the worst thing to happen to them, according to statistics from the National Council on Aging:

• One in three seniors experiences a significant fall each year
• Every 18 seconds, a senior is admitted into an emergency room after losing balance and hitting the ground
• Every 35 minutes, an elderly person dies from a fall — the leading cause of death for seniors
• The projected cost in health-care expenses for 2020 due to fall-related injuries in the United States is $55 billion,” said Karen Peterson, a therapist with multiple certifications and author of “Move With Balance: Healthy Aging Activities for Brain and Body.” She’s also the founder and director of Giving Back, a nonprofit organization that grows and spreads programs that support senior health.

“It’s important for seniors to keep moving and learning, that’s what helps improve balance and coordination, and even helps build new neural pathways,” said Peterson, who emphasizes the cognitive importance to her workout programs. “But if you’re rather frail, or just very fearful of falling, you’re less likely to get up and move around.” These activities benefit all seniors, from 55 to 103.

Peterson said a fun, social program of games and activities that include exercises specifically designed for seniors helps them address multiple issues, including those that tend to keep seniors sedentary — which only lessens their strength and balance.

Last year, her program was independently evaluated from Hawaii’s Department of Health, which found a statistically significant reduction in falls from seniors — 38 percent. It also won the MindAlert Award from the American Society on Aging.

“Seniors of all ages need to continually work on improving their balance, coordination, strength, vision and cognitive skills,” Peterson said. “When they do, they’re less likely to fall — and more able to enjoy life.”

Peterson suggested these moves, which address many different areas of the body:

• The cat jump: This activity is practiced in case of a fall; the memory muscle of the movement will be etched in your body. Bend your knees in a squat. Jump a little off the ground with both feet, and land softly, like a cat, without jarring your body. Repeat until you are confident in your ability to prevent a spill.

• The cross-crawl: After various light warm-ups, begin with the basic cross-crawl, which focuses on the fundamentals of balance. March in place, lifting the knees high. At the same time, reach across and touch the lifted knee with the opposite hand or elbow; alter-
BY LING-MEI WONG

Lion dancing is one heck of a workout, as the members of Gund Kwok can attest. Meaning “heroine” in Chinese, the Asian women’s lion dance and dragon dance group is only one of its kind in the United States.

“Our mission is about Asian women’s empowerment,” said founder Cheng Imm Tan. “We’re giving and providing a space for women to push themselves physically, mentally and emotionally.”

Founded in 1998, the group started with lion dancing and added dragon dancing. A total of 24 women are in the troupe, with a team for lion dance and another for dragon dance. Some women do both teams, Tan said.

“You don’t think you can do 20 pushups, but with the encouragement of other women, you can do it,” Tan said.

“We show the rest of the world that Asian women are strong. Traditionally lion dance was forbidden to women as a sport, because people thought women were weak and did not have discipline.”

Lion dance involves two dancers, with one as the head and the other as the body, led by a happy “Buddha” representing a monk who tames the lion. Dragon dance has more dancers perform as the body, by carrying it on poles. Dances are accompanied by gongs, drums and cymbals to represent the lion’s fierce roar and frighten away evil spirits.

“It is all about teamwork,” Tan said. “You can’t really do it alone. We do it with support of other women to give them inspiration.”

The troupe practices weekly at the China Trade Building, 2 Boylston Street, to practice kicks, build strength and boost camaraderie.

“My quads are still sore from last night’s warm-up and face-off drills,” wrote Gund Kwok member Lillian Chan in the group’s blog on May 3. (She also draws the “Empty Bamboo Girl” comic strip for Sampan.) "After a pretty intense warm-up of cardio, sprints and a whole lot of abs, we started moving all the stuff from the music room out.”

To sign up, women must enroll in a 10-week trial class. After learning the basics of lion and dragon dance, they perform a routine at their graduation and then decide whether to be a member. Members must attend 75 percent of practices and commit to a number of performances.

Gund Kwok usually is invited to 18 to 24 performances a year, which depend on demand. Women volunteer; performance requests require a fee that goes toward equipment and charities that empower women and girls.

“We want women to reclaim their strength and all of their abilities,” Tan said.