



Jaeok Lee Page 7



Dragon Boat Museum Page 10



'Learning to How to Read by Moonlight' Page 8



Sheida Soleimani Page 9



Wen-Ti Tsen Page 6

Arts in Focus

Writer Yeonhoo Cho interviews sculptor Jaeok Lee, whose works will be on exhibit at 'Ties that Bind' (top left) at the Boston Sculptors Gallery; the Dragon Boat Museum held its grand opening in Quincy on May 31 (top right); DongDong Yang reviews the Boston Center for the Art's performance of 'Learning How to Read by Moonlight'; Kevin A. Mani interviews Iranian American artist Sheida Soleimani, and Harmony Witte profiles Chinatown's own, Wen-ti Tsen. See inside.

'Unfair': Students Speak Up On Visa Policy

By Darren Liu

First there were the threats of crackdowns on immigration. Then there were the detentions of international students who had done nothing wrong. Then the deletion of many student visas and then ... their reinstatements ... for now. Amid those actions, a U.S. lawmaker has been pushing a bill to block Chinese students from coming to the U.S. Now, most recently, the U.S. State Department issued a brief statement on how it would "aggressively" crackdown on some students from China and Hong Kong. How are potential students and recent grads from China and Hong

Continues on Page 4

Lawmakers Put Asian American History to Test With Proposed Legislation

By Adam Smith

Two U.S. lawmakers have introduced a measure they say would help better educate U.S. students about the key moments and historical realities of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islander Americans that are often overlooked in U.S. classrooms and textbooks.

"At a time when Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander history is under attack, it is more important than ever before to ensure our stories of triumph and sacrifice are taught in classrooms nationwide," said New York Rep. Grace Meng, a Democrat, in an emailed statement to the *Sampan*. Meng has teamed up with Democratic Hawaiian Sen. Mazie Hirono to move the bill in Congress.

The "Teaching Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander History Act," would help remedy the

Continues on Page 13

Opinion



'They All Have Names' Vigil Reveals Moral Failures in Gaza

By Adam Smith

As Dr. Lara Jirmanus spoke with the *Sampan* on the phone on May 28, a scan of the top stories on local newspaper sites around Boston revealed reports about the Karen Read case, the latest in the battle between Harvard University and the Trump administration, and immigration raids.

What was missing?

The 24-hour vigil that just concluded hours earlier in Cambridge, recognizing the more than 17,400 children killed in Gaza since Oct. 7, 2023. That number, for context, is far larger than population of children — 13,863 — living in all of Cambridge during the 2020 Census and is rapidly increasing.

"It's just an enormous moral failure," said Dr. Jirmanus, a family physician and clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School. She participated in "They All Have Names," the live-streamed vigil in Harvard Square that was held from noon May 27 to noon May 28.

Around 100 people — including parents, students, educators and healthcare workers like Jirmanus — were at the event over the 24-hour period, holding photos of children murdered in Gaza and reading off the names of the killed. Dozens more had helped in the organizing of the demonstration.

Despite the doxing and dismissing of people who speak out for Palestine,

Jirmanus called it her ethical duty as a medical doctor to object to genocide. She also said it's disheartening to see so little attention in the mainstream press given to the massive death, destruction and starvation in that region of Palestine.

"The U.S. media is participating in this," she said. "They have blood on their hands."

In addition to working as a family physician and her instructor role at Harvard Medical School, Jirmanus also advocates for immigrant groups and founded the Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity, which advocates for an equitable response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

And she sees her advocacy for hu-

man rights in Palestine as an extension of her role as a care provider.

"True liberation only comes when everyone has rights," she said, noting that she feels public perception is on the side of ending the genocidal attack on Gaza, although many U.S. political figures still support the military strategy of Israel's current government.

"I think we're all living an emperor-has-no clothes moment," said Jirmanus. And, she added, for anyone who feels the massive death toll in Gaza is not their problem, she reminds us that:

"This is not something that's happening in a faraway place. It's something that couldn't happen at all if we were not paying for it."

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www.sampan.org

87 TYLER STREET

BOSTON, MA 02111

TEL: (617) 426-9492 x 206

FAX: (617) 482-2316

ads@sampan.org

editor@sampan.org

Chinese Editor
Ben Lee

English Editor
Adam Smith
asmith@sampan.org

Editorial Committee
Christopher John Stephens
Ed Crotty
Clare Sheridan

Literary Editor
Christopher John Stephens

Arts Critic
Harmony Witte

Translators
Bear Daddy

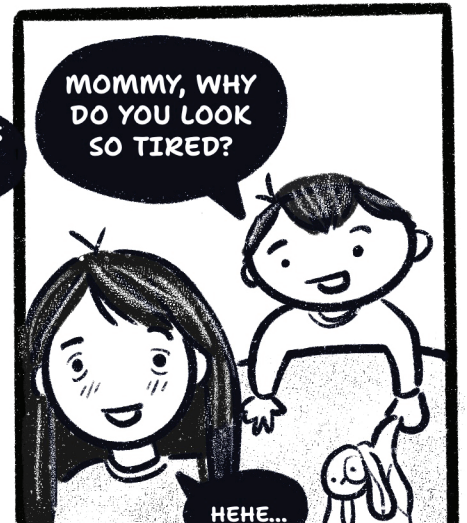
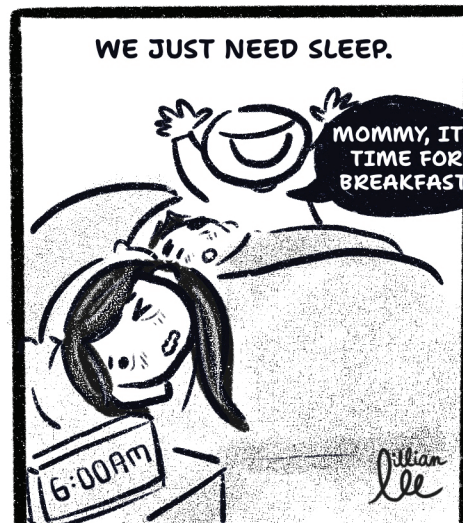
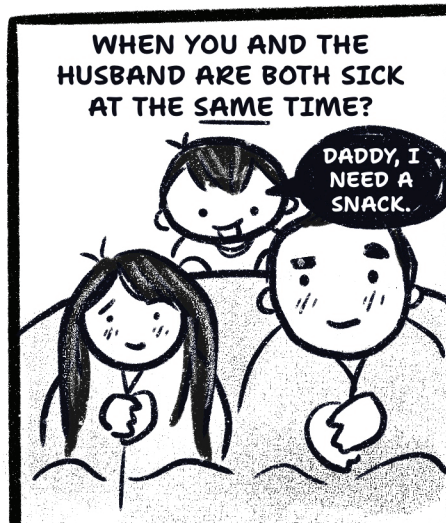
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EMPTY BAMBOO GIRL 竹升女

by Lillian Lee





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Michelle Eng, DMD
伍微醫生
Languages: Cantonese, Mandarin, and English
Practice Location: Boston and Quincy
語言: 廣東話, 國語, 英語
看診地點: 波士頓南街及昆西



John Hsu, DMD
許重平醫生
Languages: Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English
Practice Location: Boston and Quincy
語言: 國語, 台灣話, 英語
看診地點: 波士頓南街及昆西



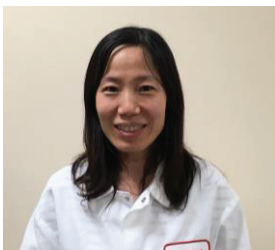
Kimberly H. Chang, DMD
張惠朱醫生
Languages: Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese and English
Practice Location: Quincy
語言: 廣東話, 國語, 台灣話, 英語
看診地點: 昆西



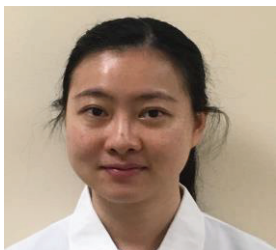
Michael T. Choi, DMD
崔泰圭醫生
Languages: Korean and English
Practice Location: Boston and Quincy
語言: 韓語, 英語
看診地點: 波士頓南街及昆西



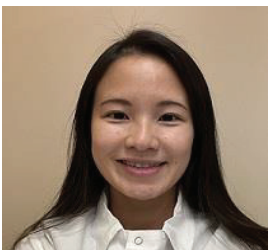
Lin Hu, DMD
胡琳醫生
Languages: Mandarin and English
Practice Location: Quincy
語言: 國語, 英語
看診地點: 昆西



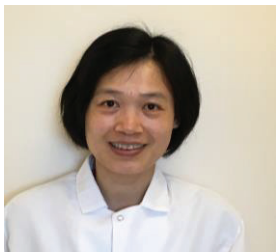
Lihua Huang, DMD
黃麗華醫生
Languages: Mandarin and English
Practice Location: Boston
語言: 國語, 英語
看診地點: 波士頓南街



Misi Huang, DMD
黃蜜絲醫生
Languages: Cantonese, Mandarin, and English
Practice Location: Boston and Quincy
語言: 廣東話, 國語, 英語
看診地點: 波士頓南街及昆西



Xueying Zhao, DDS
招學盈醫生
Languages: Cantonese, Mandarin, and English
Practice Location: Boston
語言: 廣東話, 英語, 普通話



Weiji Windy Feng,
Registered Hygienist
馮偉姬註冊洗牙師
Languages: Cantonese, Mandarin and English
Practice Location: Boston and Quincy
語言: 廣東話, 國語, 英語
看診地點: 波士頓南街及昆西



Winnie Kwong,
Registered Hygienist
鄭新芳註冊洗牙師
Languages: Cantonese, Toisanese and English
Practice Location: Boston and Quincy
語言: 廣東話, 台山話, 英語
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Asian Groups Slam U.S.’

By Adam Smith

Several Asian American groups and leaders are blasting a newly revealed State Department policy to prevent many Chinese international students from studying in colleges and universities in the United States.

The U.S. State Department on May 28 put out a notice that it “will work with the Department of Homeland Security to aggressively revoke visas for Chinese students, including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.”

The department, in the brief note, also said it would “revise visa criteria to enhance scrutiny of all future visa applications from the People’s Republic of China and Hong Kong.”

An estimated 277,000 or so students from China enrolled last school year in U.S. colleges and universities, with many studying at elite institutions in the Greater Boston area, such as Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as other major universities such as Boston University and Northeastern. The crackdown is the latest in a barrage of attacks on student visa holders and immigrant groups by the Trump administration, which had made limiting immigration a central focus of its campaign.

“The wholesale revocation of student visas based on national origin — and without an investigation — is xenophobic and wrong,” wrote the Congressional Asian Pacific American

Caucus in a statement, according to an email from the office of U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, a Democrat of New York. “Turning these students away — many of whom simply wish to learn in a free and democratic society — is not just shortsighted but a betrayal of our values.”

The caucus also warned of brain drain from the U.S. if these students stop studying here, arguing that for decades the U.S. “has drawn some of the world’s brightest minds — particularly from China — to fill talent shortages and to maintain our competitive advantage.”

In addition, it noted that international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2023-

2024 academic year, according to figures by the nonprofit group, NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC called Sec. Rubio’s announcement “yet another blow to international students and academia by the Trump administration.”

The group went on to say that it agreed that national security should be a top priority but criticized what it called “fearmongering, racial profiling, and xenophobia” by the administration.

Both groups criticized what they called vague language around the new policy, with Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC saying it risks casting all Chinese students as a “threat to national security, when the

Students: We’re Exploring Other

Continued From Page 1

Kong feeling about all this? *Sampan’s* Hong Kong correspondent, Darren Liu, set to find out. (All names have been withheld at the request of the interviewees, who fear repercussions for giving their names.)

Harvard Graduate Student, age 24, from Hong Kong, currently in the U.S.: *Having worked my entire life to be where I am today, such news causes fear for not just me, but my family. They have spent so much putting me through higher education, and if my visa were to get revoked, it would seem like such efforts were in vain. Although the Harvard administration has assured us international students not to worry, I have elected to stay in the U.S. this summer in fear of not being let back into the U.S.. I hope I will be able to return to Hong Kong for Christmas, but am not very hopeful with the current outlook. Moreover, the current situation has made me rethink my decision to even come to the U.S., as I initially debated between other offers from universities in Australia, where work visas are more readily available. I think Chinese students who may aspire to study in the U.S. should*

begin considering their choices more carefully, regardless of the Trump administration’s next actions.

High School Senior, age 18, Hong Kong: *I am currently unable to get a visa appointment, as the Hong Kong embassy’s portal has been paused. I was recently accepted to the University of California at Berkeley, and am very very disappointed about Trump’s recent policies toward the international community. Having celebrated with my family at my acceptance, it is quite disappointing to have to consider possibilities of studying in other countries or deferring my offer.*

High School Junior, age 17, Hong Kong: *I am not too concerned about such statements, as I find that it is unlikely that blatant policies limiting all Chinese students will be enacted. Instead, I am rather concerned about the fear-mongering taking place and the indications of trends to a more polarized world. Many of those around me also believe such policies will not be enacted, but nevertheless, people have begun looking towards alternate*

countries to pursue higher education, due to the high perceived risk and instability of the U.S. This has caused many to be indirectly affected. For instance, I plan to apply to Canadian universities, yet due to current events, many others have also turned to Canadian universities as an alternative to the U.S., causing admissions to become more competitive, with some fearing that other foreign universities might end up overwhelmed.

High School Junior, age 17, Hong Kong: *I think the Trump administration’s policies regarding not just Chinese but all international students are rather shortsighted. Such policies hold many macro implications, allowing for other countries to gain a competitive advantage by hosting such bright students. As most of the international community already knows, international students are held to a rather high standard when competing for admission into America’s prestigious universities, therefore, by giving up such students, America will likely suffer in the long-term. Instead, I am rather curious as to the opinions of average Americans on the current*

policies.

High School Junior, age 17, Hong Kong: *I think such policies are extremely unfair, as many students have worked very hard to try to go to the U.S. to study, and are no longer given the opportunity to even apply due to possible visa restrictions. However, Trump’s statements have been quite vague, so we will have to wait and see. However, being a Hong Kong resident, I find that it is not very appropriate that we are targeted as well. We are a special administrative region, similar to Macau, but are alienated with China. Being a strong advocate against China’s increasingly direct rule over Hong Kong, this seems like an unjust punishment.*

High School Senior, age 18, Shenzhen: *Being in an extremely competitive international region, Trump’s administration and comments only add stress to the already stressful process of applying to U.S. universities. Since going to the US has been a long-term goal of mine, I will continue to work towards it and hope the situation*

Unverified Reports of Immigration Agents Spread Anxiety in

By Milourdes Augustin

Anxiety is gripping some Chinatown Residents and community leaders after hearing of unconfirmed reports of immigration agents in the neighborhood.

“We want to find a balance between keeping people safe without spreading too much fear,” said Karen Chen, who directs the Chinese Progressive Agency.

That agency held an emergency meeting for residents on May 27 to discuss reports by two individuals who said they had witnessed what they believed to be Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in the neighborhood. No video or photographic evidence was

offered to support either incident. But reports of agents in various areas around Greater Boston have been widespread, including several high profile cases of ICE abductions and detentions, including that of Tufts student Rümeysa Öztürk and most recently of a high school student in Milford who was reportedly on the way to volleyball practice.

During the meeting Chen stated that a couple weeks prior, a young man who was riding on his bike on a Chinatown street spotted what appeared to be two agents wearing a bulletproof vests with guns in holsters, interrogating an elderly Chinese woman who seemed to have

been confused by the encounter. The young man reported this sighting to his family and through word of mouth, CPA was made aware of the incident, said Chen.

Then, more recently, a man reported to friends and family that at approximately 8 a.m. on a Saturday, he heard a knock on his door and when he opened it, he was met with around five agents, all wearing bulletproof vests and with guns in their holsters on their hips. They asked this man for his name and asked him to step aside while they entered the door and walked up and down each floor of the multi-story building. The man

reported the agents entered several other buildings around Pine Street, which houses many Asian American residents. The man did not report any arrests and said the men simply just left in their sedans after entering the apartment buildings.

The meeting’s organizers stressed that people should be informed of their rights when approached by immigration officials or witnessing encounters with agents. According to legal experts, people have the right to not open their door if officials lack a warrant signed by a actual judge, the right to remain silent and to avoid signing any document

Policy on China Students

reality is that the overwhelming majority of students simply come here to learn.”

For centuries, Asian Americans have been the target of discriminatory policies in the U.S., such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. But at the same time, the U.S. has long criticized China over the production of counterfeit goods and the theft of intellectual property, with accusations reported in recent years that data was taken from major companies such as GE, chemical firms, and semiconductor and computer technology companies. Worry over stolen technology goes back decades, and spans many industries, including agriculture.

“We agree that anyone who comes to the United States under false pretenses to gather intelligence with the intention of benefiting a foreign adversary like the Chinese Communist Party has no place here, and should be addressed,” wrote the caucus lawmakers. “However, the lack of any details about the process or standards by which (the State Department intends) to conduct this review raises serious concerns that innocent students will be caught up in this ordeal, simply because they are of Chinese descent. That’s not smart national security policy — it’s just un-American,” wrote the lawmakers.

The move comes after a bill was introduced in March by U.S. Rep. Riley M. Moore, a Republican of West Virginia, that sought to stop the issuance of student visas to Chinese nationals. The “The Stop Chinese Communist Prying by Vindicating Intellectual Safeguards in Academia Act” would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to include language prohibiting the admission of Chinese nationals as “nonimmigrant” students. It has so far not advanced in Congress.

In response to efforts to revoke visas and detain international students, several U.S. lawmakers from Massachusetts penned a letter seeking to appeal to Kristi Noem, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and expressing “grave” concerns over the detentions, deportations and attempts to block and remove students.

“The Administration’s apparent hostility to international students contributes to an overall climate of fear on campuses. This trend creates a chilling effect that discourages the best and brightest students from around the world from coming to study in the United States — which harms not only current and prospective international students, but also American universities, U.S. citizen students on campuses, and, in the long term, the nation’s prosperity and economic growth,” argued the lawmakers who signed the May 28 letter. Among the signatories were Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Ayanna Pressley and Edward Markey and Reps. Seth Moulton and Stephen F. Lynch.

Options

Under President Trump’s leadership, the U.S. State Department will work with the Department of Homeland Security to aggressively revoke visas for Chinese students, including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields. We will also revise visa criteria to enhance scrutiny of all future visa applications from the People’s Republic of China and Hong Kong.

- Marco Rubio, Secretary of State, May 28

improves and I am able to ultimately matriculate to the US. Being that I have taken a gap year to reapply to the US, this comes at an extremely poor timing. I fear that my time and efforts will go to waste, especially since the US application process is quite different to other countries, for example, my SAT and APs scores will have gone to nothing.

Chinatown

without first consulting a lawyer. More information can be found at lucemass.org/resources or at mass.gov/doc/ago-ice-guidance-05292025/download.

Boston City Councilor Ed Flynn, who joined the meeting, urged residents to inform the Mayor’s office of any such sightings.

“I represent Chinatown, South End and the Bay Village,” said Flynn. “I’m here to support the community and to support our residents. I know the incredible role immigrants play here in our city and I’ve always respected the Chinese community and am here to support you in anyway I possibly can.”



CHINATOWN, BOSTON
Photo by Adam Smith

Arts in Focus Pages 6-10

Carving Out a Place for the Common Person

Chinatown's Wen-ti Tsen, a Wagner Arts Fellowship Awardee, Tells His Story

By Harmony Witte

Longtime Chinatown-based sculptor and painter Wen-ti Tsen is among three Boston artists recently awarded the Wagner Arts Fellowship.

The new arts fellowship — also awarded to L'Merchie Frazier and Daniela Rivera — was created by the Wagner Foundation for artists who incorporate elements of social impact or social change in their work. Each winner is given \$75,000 in unrestricted funding that they can use however they want and can access to specialized services.

Tsen is currently working on two large-scale projects. The first includes bronze sculptures of four workers. That project will be located in Chinatown and slated to be unveiled in 2026 for the 250th anniversary of the United States. The second, are two large-scale “Year of the Tiger” paintings that “celebrate the good things in life.” There will be a Winter and a Summer piece when the pair is complete. He’s been an artist for a half century.

“People look at art — and people think, ‘Oh, anybody can do that. And they think it’s something you can do in a few hours or just with a bunch of color pens and things like that.’ But actually ... it takes people a long time to realize that making a sculpture of a life-size figure ... will take about half a year going through the process,” he said of the bronze sculpture project.

“I have to go out to different foundries and sculpture studios, have the molds made and have the bronze casting poured into the mold.”

Humans have been working with bronze sculptures for around 4,000 years, he added, explaining that that is why he chose the medium for his project.

“I want to affirm that the subject that I’m trying to do — of paying tribute to workers, which is not often done, especially in these high-quality art pieces. I would like it to be done in the best way that would be challenging Michael Angelo and the Greeks.”

He expressed his desire to see “ev-



COMMON CELEBRATION: Artist Wen-ti Tsen in his studio.

Photo by Ben Lee

eryday people who have jobs being a waiter, being a cook, being a garment worker, and grandmothers taking care of children. Those would be the people who walk by and see suddenly that their lives have been promoted in the oldest form of art that is usually reserved for emperors or philosophers or soldiers more than anything and politicians on horseback.”

Tsen mused that people might be a little surprised and ask, “‘How come it’s not about a famous person?’ but I said ‘It’s about us.’” Tsen said he was inspired by his 30 years of working as a film projectionist to choose the workers as his subject matter.

Tsen spoke of feeling hope that people from different backgrounds will see the statues and feel a connection. He hopes people think, “My grandparents were just like that. They were doing exactly the same thing moving ahead for their children, for their grandchildren.”

Influencing Tsen has been his time working with the Asian American Resource Workshop and the Chinese Progressive Association.

“That kind of changed my life,” he said.

He was asked to do a Chinatown

mural in 1986, which was the start of his work with the groups.

“Before that, I was involved politically with many different groups. But also, coincidentally, I think it was also during that time when all the different ethnic movements starting to separate from each other. Everybody’s doing their own thing.”

He continued, “If I had my choice, I would have liked to continue to work with all the people of color and all the progressive groups.”

Tsen said he was “geared toward” the Asian American community through his work with the Asian American Resource Workshop and had been following Asian American social movements as well as other movements, but when he started creating public art, he expanded his outlook.

“I am very conscious that there’s always something to learn about all these other groups that I have not known about,” he said.

“I think being Asian American and in Chinatown (was a way) through which I was able to understand (more of) the world. So, everything is having to dig deeper and understanding more.”

Abigail Satinsky, who is the program officer and curator for art and culture at the Wagner Foundation said the idea of the fellowship is to support visual artists at all career levels in greater Boston to stay and thrive here.

“It’s sort of a way we recognize the artists that have this long commitment to this place, that have been part of community, that are storytellers, that are part of amplifying the voices of those that they care about. And so, I think that’s just something we really want to highlight. This idea of established artists a marker of really investing in the artists that make Boston great.”

To celebrate the first year of the fellowship, the winners will be showcased at the Mass Art Museum as part of the first Boston Public Art Triennial in an exhibition titled “Generations,” which will be on display now through Nov. 30.

For Tsen, however, life itself is a gratifying as creating artwork. He was born in Shanghai, China in 1936.

“My greatest satisfaction is actually in living my life. So that I think I’m over, way overdue for expiration date anyway. Until I can finish these pieces, I’m pretty happy with it.”



How Artist Jaeok Lee Shapes the Space Between Life and Death

By Yeonhoo Cho

Artist Jaeok Lee immigrated from her home in Nak Won Dong, in the heart of Seoul, to the United States in 1974. Now based in Sudbury, 71-year-old Lee has a home and studio atop a hill — a pocket of enchantment. The land bursts with rare flowers and is populated with chipmunks living among deer; punctuating the property are ceramic beoksu — guardian posts — and sotdae — poles topped with birds — rising like guardians. The garden perpetually invites birds and insects, reviving senses often dulled in Boston's urban pace.

I visited Lee to discuss her debut solo exhibition at Boston Sculptors Gallery, “Ties That Bind,” which draws from ancient Korean traditions to explore regeneration, oppression, and the everyday burdens women carry. But the trip was much more. Visiting her home, in fact, felt like being teleported to the Korean countryside.

Stepping into her studio — where she creates ceramics, monoprints, and ink drawings — is like entering another world. Ornate wooden furniture, aged and intricate, anchors the space. Many of the pieces traveled from Korea, stewarded by Lee herself. One standout is an apothecary chest — its many drawers filled with porcelain figurines inspired by plants. Each delicate piece was crafted during a time when Lee was bedridden, her body failing her in ways even doctors could not explain.

“My body lost its functions to the point it was hard to even open my eyes,” she recalls. “When I could get up, I’d go outside to pick up something small, like a seed, flower, or a fruit, and muster my remaining energy to create small porcelain figurines.”

This became Each Seed a New Life. Her deeply personal, therapeutic art

practice produced an entire cabinet of handmade pieces, born from illness, uncertainty, and hope.

“These porcelains were like my medicine,” Lee explains. She does not beautify suffering. She displays it plainly, inviting the viewer to witness a period marked by pain that can’t be located, and a future that is suspended.

As a young woman, she had a feeling that she might not live a long life. She didn’t think she’d live beyond 60. Having outlived her own expectations, she contemplates death and negotiates with mortality with a deep fascination in end-of-life care and death-related customs. Pain, grief, and death are not avoided, but rather metabolized through her art. Her artwork brings the audience closer to the borders between this world (yiseung) and that world (jeoseung). Death is not an end in Lee’s work but a fertile and generative realm. Her installations evoke a poetics of death that are deeply Korean, yet universally resonant. Her art suggests that by sitting with death — by preparing for it, imagining it, and materializing it — we become more fully alive.

Memory — both personal and collective — is central to her practice. Her ceramic beoksu resemble porous rock, embodying her ancestors and other important figures in her life, including her late dog, Dory. One of her most powerful works depicts her mother carrying her older sister across the cold Han River during the Korean War, a journey that ended with the death of her infant sibling — a rarely told family trauma materialized in clay.

Having witnessed and planned the funerals of both her parents, two decades apart, Lee has also turned her attention to the vanishing rituals of Korean traditional funerals. “For my

father’s funeral 20 years ago, we still had some of the old rites. But by my mother’s time, they were gone. Everything was arranged by the hospital. I felt how fast a culture can disappear.”

One such disappearing tradition is the sangyeo — a bier used to carry the deceased.

“Sangyeo can be extremely colorful and ornate,” she says. “They are coarse, not delicate, because they were built by village people, not professionals. Some families owned them like heirlooms, but poorer communities would build and share them when someone died.”

Lee’s fascination with funeral traditions, combined with her personal proximity with mortality and death, continues to fuel her ongoing body of work, an exploration of Korean funeral tradition and death-related customs.

Reflecting these sensibilities is the central installation of “The Ties that Bind,” an exhibition honoring four generations of women in Lee’s family, while speaking to the wider experience of first-generation immigrants. At its center, she erects five sotdae — tall wooden poles wrapped in silk fabrics inherited from her mother, once part of a crumbling picket fence. Scattered around are oversized ceramic thimbles (golmu), tools used by her foremothers. Lee sees golmu not only as artifacts of domesticity but also as vessels of care, protection, and creativity. Red beans (pat), known to ward off evil, are spread throughout the space, inviting the audience into Lee’s cosmology of spiritual safeguarding.

Through her late-blooming yet inexhaustible practice, she honors not only her mother but generations of women whose creativity and artistry were never recognized as art. In Lee’s world, the ordinary becomes sacred. The broken becomes seed. Protection

takes shape in clay, silk, and thread.

She draws inspiration from mudang, Korean shamans who pass down spiritual gifts through generations. “They were mistreated and heavily stigmatized in Korean society,” she says. “Some suffered physical and mental symptoms when they denied their destiny. I see them as multimedia artists and stewards of the cultural roots in shamanic and folk culture. I am enraged by the Western and Christian influenced attempts that try to erase them, stigmatizing shamanic culture as backward and superstitious.”

Though Lee does not claim spiritual powers herself, she sees her role as adjacent: to preserve, honor, and extend these cultural practices through art.

Her career as an artist has been non-linear. Health challenges, raising a family, and running a clothing business for over a decade delayed and redirected her practice. She still mourns the period when she couldn’t enroll in a Master of Fine Arts program due to her health. She also looks back at the choices she made during her recovery, such as living in spiritually charged Jiri Mountain, as key opportunities which motivated her to continue practicing art.

Lee’s work is a reclamation of what has been lost, overlooked, or deemed unworthy of preservation. Through her, ancient practices speak again, not as relics, but as living, breathing gestures of care, grief, and protection.

“I may not be a mudang,” she says, “but I hope to carry forward their spirit.”

“Jaeok Lee: The Ties That Bind” runs concurrently with “Hillel O’Leary: Unmanned Vessel” June 12 – July 13 at the Boston Sculptors Gallery; Reception & Artist’s Talk is Sunday, June 15, 2 - 5 p.m.



‘Learning How to Read’ Gives Touching Glimpse Into Immigrant Child’s Life

By DongDong Yang

“Learning How to Read by Moonlight,” written by Gaven D. Trinidad, is a touching and imaginative play running through June 8.

The story follows six-year-old Eddie and his Nanay (mother) as they seek a new beginning in the U.S. after escaping danger in the Philippines. As Eddie navigates the challenges of growing up undocumented, learning English, and discovering his queer identity, he and his imaginary friend create vibrant worlds to make sense of it all.

Blending storytelling, dance, music, and rich visuals, the play brings themes of immigration, family, friendship, and identity to life. Special moments, like guided breathing exercises, invite the audience to pause, reflect, and connect more deeply with the story.

This *Sampan* reporter saw the performance at the Boston Center for the Arts, one of three venues for the show, and spoke with members of the cast to learn more about their roles and reflections.

Jude Torres, who plays “Jimmy,” the bold, colorful imaginary friend, said the role pushed him far out of his comfort zone.

“I usually wear all black and keep to myself, so wearing the wig and playing such a colorful character on stage took a lot of bravery.”

“We often try to assimilate, stay quiet, get along with everyone, and avoid drawing attention. But stepping into this character taught me that being the best version of yourself not only gives you strength, but also empowers those around you to be themselves too.”

He’s also reminded us:

“The world can feel scary and lonely, but if you lead with kindness, you can never go wrong.”

As I watched the show, I found myself wondering, maybe we all have imaginary friends. Maybe they are the truest parts of ourselves, finally stepping out instead of hiding inside.

Elijah Estolano Punzal, who plays

Eddie and brings Eddie’s puppet to life, hopes the story inspires audiences to reconnect with imagination and wonder.

“Dare to hope, dare to dream more, and feel with your inner child, because that’s where so much possibility comes from, even today and the future.”

Christine Armenion, who plays Nanay reflected on the power of community and care.

“There’s so much love among all of us that we can share. You give and you get, it really helps support and show others who even in the darkest times, people out there who love you and care for you. We can spread that around.”

When asked how we can support one another during these challenging times, Elijah emphasized community connection.

“Deep listening, engage with your community. Like Chuang Stage and Company One, often hosted special community nights to bring the story to people who don’t normally get to see it.”

Christine added, “Pay attention. Speak up. Reach out to the people you know. If there was ever a time to do that, now is the time.”

The show takes a creative approach with visible puppetry, audiences can see both the puppet (Eddie) and the actor operating it. This adds an extra layer to the performance, deepening emotional connection and sparking imagination.

Audience members shared their reactions after the show.

J.K., a Chinatown resident, told me, the show was reminiscent of a Disney-Pixar movie, “the stage design, the art, the visuals — it was all amazing.”

At the start of the show at the Pao Arts Center, another audience member, Anna, teared up: “My family is still in the Philippines. I miss them.”

“Learning How to Read by Moonlight” is at The Umbrella Arts Center until June 8.

For tickets and more information, visit: <https://companyone.org/>

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Sheida Soleimani Creates Art of Resistance

By Kevin A. Mani

Art can be beautiful, art can attack, or it can do both at the same time. It has long been used to challenge the status quo, and Sheida Soleimani, a 33-year-old visual media artist and Brandeis University professor, has made it her mission to shed light on the challenges of her Iranian heritage through her politically-charged work.

“I want to leave people a trail of breadcrumbs,” Soleimani said. “I don’t expect anyone to have any crazy epiphanies. But if someone Googles one of my artworks, that’s a great starting point. The idea is to tackle important social issues.”

Soleimani’s art focuses on political oppression and social justice. Her style, influenced by her parents’ experiences as well as the current tensions and persecutions in their homeland, uses performance, film,

photography, sculpture and other forms of expression. Soleimani’s newest project, however, uses the power of words: She’s ghostwriting the accounts of her parents’ experiences. She calls this her most important project to date. It will include photographs that focus on their experiences as political refugees and their challenges in adapting to U.S. life.

But that yet-to-be-completed undertaking comes after years of creating art. Bringing together images from news and social media, her bold, collage-like compositions expose disturbing truths hidden in encoded media messages. Her collage “Hotbed” (2020), for example, draws attention to Iran’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The work reproduces a detail from a press photo taken of Iran’s deputy health minister during a moment in which he was publicly insisting on Iran’s effective handling

of the pandemic while simultaneously wiping his brow with a handkerchief. Soon after, it was revealed that he was privately battling the virus during this most public of announcements. Soleimani’s work satirically critiques global politics, power structures and both Eastern and Western cultures, revealing the overconsumption of political information.

Soleimani, who now lives in Rhode Island, grew up in Indianapolis as the daughter of political refugees who fled Iran after the 1979 revolution. Her parents’ stories of struggle and survival profoundly influenced her art, which often addresses the failures of the Iranian government to provide a minimum standard of living for its citizens. Her work also reflects the U.S. government’s role in the politics of Iran.

Soleimani said her father’s political activism and experiences as a young medical student in Iran, precisely when the Iranian regime was established in the late 1970s, have had an incalculable impact on her artwork and worldview.

Her father, Dr. Manoocher Soleimani, was a political refugee who fled to the United States in the early 1980s after the rise of the Islamic Republic. He recalled talking to his daughter about his experiences and their impact on her, furthering her interest in Iranian activism.

“What she absorbed from me is to improve the society around us, and the society around us doesn’t change if we pay attention just to our personal lives,” Dr. Soleimani said. “Life is bigger than all of us, and society demands that we pay our dues.”

Dr. Soleimani said he is proud of his

daughter’s activism through art. He had instilled a philosophy of remaining “true to yourself” in his daughter from an early age, which he believes fueled her commitment to activism.

Dr. Soleimani also said his wife insisted on teaching Farsi, the official language of Iran, to their daughter. He believes the language linked his daughter “to Iranian culture [and] to her roots.”

Soleimani’s other artwork also takes aim at political structures and actions. She depicted top U.S. officials, such as former Vice President Dick Cheney, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to criticize the U.S.’ involvement in Iraq.

In one such artwork, she paints Rumsfeld holding hands with Cheney while wearing only a \$100 bill towel and baseball cap, suggesting a corrupt relationship between politics and corporate greed.

The image of Kissinger kneeling beside the partially nude José María Botelho de Vasconcelos, Angola’s Minister of Petroleum, raising an oil-smeared diamond ring is a potent commentary on the global exploitation of natural resources by powerful nations.

Soleimani said ghostwriting stories of people from diasporas became popular in the early 2000s in the form of memoirs. Learning from different immigrant experiences about finding identity within a new cultural landscape, she was inspired to share her own parents’ stories.

“My parents’ stories helped me find my way to the stories of people like them.”

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‘Khooroo Manoocher’ 2021; Image courtesy of the artist

Dragon Boat Museum Celebrates Opening



DRAGON FEST: Artist Peter Ng gives a presentation of Dragon boats at the grand opening of the Quincy Dragon Boat Museum. Photo by Ben Lee


Over 300 people attended the opening of the Dragon Boat Museum in Quincy, Massachusetts on May 31. As part of Quincy’s 400th Anniversary of its settlement, the museum welcomed the public to explore the historical significance of dragon boats and the deep roots of dragon boat racing in Asian cultures. The

Dragon Boat Museum is the vision of artist Peter Ng. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Matt Seto, CEO of the Dragon Boat Museum and Executive Director of the American Legion Chinatown Post 328, said, “This museum is not just about boats. It’s about heritage, perseverance, and the enduring spir-

it of the community. We are proud to open our doors in Quincy, a city with a rich maritime past and a dynamic multicultural future.” Quincy City Council President Ian Cain remarked on the significance of the moment: “The Asian community has become such a strong pillar of our city — building organizations,



founding small businesses, and really making Quincy thrive.” Then he added: “I’ve never been in a dragon boat, but I look forward to being trained.” For more, see <https://sampan.org/2025/uncategorized-en/artist-fulfills-dream-with-dragon-boat-museum/> — Ben Lee

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Boston Water and Sewer Commission

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Larkwood – Phase 2
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Price: \$285,900 (condo fee: \$178/month)

Larkwood is a new development located at 643 Church Street in Raynham, MA. This is a lottery for the next nine (9) affordable units at Larkwood. This community will eventually consist of thirty-five (35) affordable units. The 9 units made available in this lottery are shown in the chart below and will come in a variety of home styles. These 9 units will be sold at affordable prices to households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income. The affordable homes are expected to be ready starting in the Summer or 2025. The affordable homes provide ample square footage, feature 1.5 or 2 baths and parking.

Maximum Household Income Limits

\$78,500 (1 person), \$89,700 (2 people), \$100,900 (3 people)
\$112,100 (4 people), \$121,100 (5 people), \$130,050 (6 people)

Maximum Household Asset Limit: \$75,000



Public Info Session: June 25, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom
Go to [zoom.com/join](https://zoom.us/join) or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 818 9317 7595. Passcode: 088159


Application Deadline: July 15, 2025 at 2:00 pm
Completed Applications and Mortgage Pre-Approvals must be delivered by this date.

Lottery: July 28, 2025 at 6:00pm via Zoom.
Go to [zoom.com/join](https://zoom.us/join) or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 857 2736 5609, Passcode: 276410

Attendance is not required at Info or Lottery sessions. To view the recorded sessions at a later date, please search for Larkwood Phase 2 on the SEB Housing YouTube channel.

For Lottery Information and Applications, or for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, go to www.sebhousing.com or call (617) 782-6900x2 and leave a message or postal mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494. For TTY Services dial 711. Free translation available. **Traducción gratuita disponible. Tradução livre disponível.**





City of Boston
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Virtual Public Meeting

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16

6:00 PM
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ZONING

Register: [bostonplans.org/
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Toll Free: (833) 568 - 8864
Meeting ID: 161 442 0881



DESCRIPTION:

Please join the Planning Department for a virtual public meeting to review the final draft zoning amendment for Downtown, released on May 29. Reflecting extensive public feedback, the revised draft strengthens protections for Downtown’s historic and cultural areas while enabling the housing and mixed-use growth needed to ensure a more vibrant and inclusive neighborhood for generations to come.

Mail to: **Andrew Nahmias**
Planning Department One City Hall Square, 9th Floor Boston, MA 02201
Phone: 617-635-1234
Email: PLANdowntown@boston.gov

Website: bit.ly/4ghL7nh

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Teresa Polhemus, Executive Director/Secretary

Affordable Housing Lottery

Lore

266 Canal Street Salem, MA

YOU CAN COMPLETE AND SUBMIT A LOTTERY APPLICATION ONLINE HERE:



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Lore

is a brand-new development located in Salem. There will be a total of 250 rental units within the community, including 50 affordable apartments which will be leased to households with incomes at or below 60% of the area median income through this application process. Community amenities include a swimming pool, lounge and entertainment spaces, a pet spa, and coworking spaces.

Maximum Household Income Limits

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Public Info Session:

July 10, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom
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Application Deadline:

August 4, 2025 at 2:00 pm
Completed Applications and must be delivered or postmarked by this date. Applications postmarked by the deadline must be received no later than 5 business days from the deadline.


Lottery:

August 18, 2025 at 6:00pm via Zoom
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Teresa Polhemus, 首席采购官

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3	\$119,100
4	\$132,300
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Asian American History Bill in Congress

Indeed the history of this diverse population is vast and intertwined with the nation's past, and includes crucial events and critical figures that helped shape the nation's civil and immigrant rights movements and

Sen. Hirono said it's critical to

“Teaching Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander history is critical to gaining a better understanding of the discrimination and prejudice endured by the AANHPI community, as well as our community’s many accomplishments,” added Sen. Hironaka in a statement. “As diversity, equity, and inclusion continue to be attacked



WU WONG

Despite the bill's uphill battle ahead in a Republican-led Congress, its backers hope that this time the resolution will make

As *Sampson* reported recently, a survey released in May about views of Americans in general on Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians found a severe lack of knowledge about Asian Americans and their history. When asked to name a famous person from those backgrounds, for example, most people could not name one and those who did picked martial arts celebrities from decades past, such as Bruce Lee, who died a half century ago. The survey also found a lack of knowledge about historical events such as the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the early 1940s.

**Salem Housing Authority and Marblehead Housing Authority
ARE NOW ACCEPTING HOUSING
APPLICATIONS FOR ALL STATE PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMS AND
SECTION 8.**



The City of Salem and the Town of Marblehead are wonderful, diverse north shore communities to live in. They offer an abundance of history, valuable resources for residents, art and are located on the East Coast of Massachusetts with beautiful views.

This advertisement will be available for Applicants in Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese and by calling the Salem Housing Authority at 978-744-4431 extension 101.

申请人可致电 Salem 市房屋委员会索取本广告的韩语、越南语和广东话版本，电话：978-744-4431 分机 101。

申請人可致電 Salem 市房屋委員會索取本廣告的韓語、越南語和廣東話版本，電話：978-744-4431 分機 101。

Bản quảng cáo này sẽ được cung cấp cho Các Ứng Viên bằng tiếng Hàn, tiếng Việt, và tiếng Quảng Đông. Để yêu cầu một bản, hãy gọi cho Salem Housing Authority (Cơ Quan Nhà Ở Salem) theo số 978-744-4431, máy lẻ 101.

Salem Housing Authority에 978-744-4431(내선 101)로 전화하시면 이 광고가 한국어, 베트남어, 광둥어로 신청자에게 제공됩니다.

The Salem Housing Authority and Marblehead Housing Authorities are committed to providing a full range of affordable housing opportunities that are decent, safe and sanitary to eligible low income elderly, family, and handicapped persons in a fair manner. The Authorities strive to make the best use of all available resources so that its residents and participants may live in an environment that is clean, well maintained and attractive by taking advantage of available government resources. The Authorities goals are to manage its public housing units in a manner that is consistent with good, financially sound property management practices. Salem and Marblehead Housing Authorities do not discriminate on any basis in the selection process of applications.

APPLY NOW!

To Apply to the SALEM HOUSING AUTHORITY: All applicants may visit the Salem Housing Authority Website at <https://www.salemlha.org> and download and print your paper application or the applicants may request that the Salem Housing Authority mail an application to them by calling the main office at 978-744-4431, applicants may also pick up an application at the Main Office, 27 Charter Street, Salem, MA 01970.

All applicants may apply on line via the CHAMP Portal- <https://publichousingapplication.ocd.state.ma.us>.
The CHAMP Portal allows you to create your own account and manage your application status. You may also select as many agencies as you wish to apply to.

Applicants may also visit the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities website at - <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-livable-communities> and download and print a paper application.

Applicants may also apply for Section 8 and Federal Public Housing (Federal Public Housing subject to list opening) by visiting the Salem Housing Authority website at <https://www.salemha.org>. Applicants may also apply for Section 8 by visiting <https://www.Affordablehousing.com> and by visiting the Section 8 Main Office located at 136 Canal Street, Unit 1 and 2, Salem, MA 01970, telephone: 978-744-4431 extension 121.

The Salem Housing Authority provides accessible units in accordance with M.G.L. C.11B, Section 4(7A).

The Salem Housing Authority will offer reasonable accommodations in the application process. The Salem Housing Authority will also provide application materials in alternative formats, engage in alternative means of communication and provide assistance with the application process as necessary to ensure that persons with disabilities are reasonable accommodated and have equally effective access to the SHA's programs.

The Salem Housing Authority will provide free language assistance to applicants, translated into the languages of Limited English Proficiency ("LEP").

To Apply to the MARBLEHEAD HOUSING AUTHORITY: All applicants may visit the Marblehead Housing Authority Website at <https://marbleheadha.org> and download an application or the applicants may request that the Marblehead Housing Authority mail an application to them by calling 781-631-2580, applicants may also pick up an application at the Main Office, 26 Rowland Street, Marblehead, MA 01945.

All applicants may apply on line via the CHAMP Portal- <https://publichousingapplication.ocd.state.ma.us>. The CHAMP Portal allows you to create your own account and manage your application status. You may also select as many agencies as you wish to apply to.

Applicants may also visit the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-livable-communities> and download and print a paper application.

The Marblehead Housing Authority provides accessible units in accordance with M.G.L. C.11B, Section 4(7A). The Marblehead Housing Authority will offer reasonable accommodations in the application process. The Marblehead Housing Authority will also provide application materials in alternative formats, engage in alternative means of communication, and provide assistance with the application process as necessary to ensure that persons with disabilities are reasonable accommodated and have equally effective access to the MHA's programs.

The Marblehead Housing Authority will provide free language assistance to applicants, translated into the languages of Limited English Proficiency ("LEP").

Hong Kong Fest Takes Over Somerville



Text and photo by DongDong Yang

The New England Hong Kong Festival is an annual, community-run event that brings together the local Hongkonger community to celebrate during Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Month. This year, it happened on Children’s Day, June 1, at Seven Hills Park in Somerville.

The festival was full of energy and culture, with live music from local Cantonese bands like Jukxing and Contempo, a photo booth, and pop-up

shops. Bright Hong Kong-style street signs hung from the trees, creating the feeling of being back in the city. Families and kids enjoyed Cantonese board games, played Mahjong, and authentic street food like curry fishballs, milk tea, and sweet red bean pudding.

There were also limited-edition merch, local newspapers, and a station where visitors could design their own custom buttons. It was the perfect day to celebrate culture, community, and connection.

CCBA Celebrates New Housing in Chinatown

Beacon Communities and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Boston held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the grand opening of 85 new affordable housing units located at the Pok Oi Apartments in Boston’s Chinatown. The six-story building that sits next to Beacon’s Tai Tung Village features a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units, a community room, on-site laundry and other amenities. Nine households within the building will

be occupied by those experiencing homelessness.

At the event were Boston Mayor Michelle Wu; Dara Kovel, CEO, Beacon Communities; Felix Lui, President, CCBA; Senator Nick Collins, First Suffolk; Representative Aaron Michlewicz, Third Suffolk; Charlie Liao, Director-General, TECO Boston, Dana LeWinter, Chief of Public and Community Engagement, and other state and community leaders. — Sampan staff



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- 如发现任何可疑费用，请拨打800-892-0890向**马萨诸塞州长者医疗巡逻队（SMP）**报告。

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