



Matsuriza Japanese Taiko Drummers

▶ Indonesian dance performance



little participant in traditional Indian dress

Child from India Association



Women dressed in traditional Thai attire



Experience Asia 2009

Fifth Annual Festival

■ By **Thayumanasamy Somasundaram**
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Learning about Asian culture was as easy as a walk in the park when Asian Coalition of Tallahassee celebrated the Experience Asia Festival 2009 in downtown Tallahassee on Sat, Oct 3, 2009 between 10 AM and 5 PM.

For the fifth year in a row Asian Coalition of Tallahassee (ACT | www.asiantlh.org) and its members hosted their premier annual event called Experience Asia Festival at the Chain of Parks in downtown Tallahassee, FL. ACT is a Florida non-profit umbrella organization with over dozen member associations and individuals representing Asian and Asian-Pacific countries. It was established in 2004 by the current Chair-

man Dr. Clyde Diao with five charter member organizations. The main impetus for forming the organization was to allow Asian and Asian-Pacific Americans to get together, showcase the talents of its members, and share their rich culture and heritage with others. In addition, the organization wanted to establish long-term connections to the Big Bend communities which the Association members now call home and foster a goodwill and

understanding between the locals and the Asian community. Originally the ACT was established with the Big Bend Filipino American Association, India Association of Tallahassee, North Florida Chinese Association, the Tallahassee Families with Asian Children, and the Chinese Association of Tallahassee as charter members. But, now it has grown to include several more organizations such as, FSU International Center, Japanese,





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Thai, Taiwanese, Korean, Persian, and Pakistani communities, and several Student associations and non-profit organizations.

In 2005, the first Experience Asia Festival, a multicultural program sponsored by ACT attracted approximately 1200 people. In subsequent years, due to the welcoming nature and open-mindedness of the citizens of Tallahassee and Leon County, the Festival started to attract ever larger crowds. Last year the Festival saw an attendance of well over 13,000 people to downtown Tallahassee. Everyone who came enjoyed a full-day (10:00 AM to 5:00 PM) of non-stop entertainment, demonstrations, and delicious Asian cuisine. This year we saw a crowd similar to last year at the Festival scheduled on last Saturday, October 03, 2009 between 10:00 AM and 5:00 PM.

As everyone in the country and especially the citizens of greater Tallahassee go through the toughest economic downturn of recent memory, Festivals like this can play a crucial role in alleviating the pain felt by everyone. The reasons are many fold. First of all, a free and variety entertainment program like Experience Asia can

be a refresher to the mind and body, uplifting one's spirit during hard times. Secondly, learning about different culture and heritage is one way to reinvent oneself and thus giving enthusiasm to learn a new trade, profession, or a skill. Thirdly, in the emerging global economy and the interconnected world we now live, those who learn about and understand other partners in trade, business, and education stand to benefit more than those who don't. Finally, spending time with exhibitors, vendors, performers, and volunteers gives everyone an opportunity to make long-term friendship, partnership, and companionship.

Like last year, this year's festival featured cultural performers and arts and crafts exhibitors from 15 different countries and cultures. There were more than dozen food vendors providing mouth-watering Asian cuisines. The featured attraction for this year was Japanese Maturiza Taiko Drummers from Orlando, FL and Chinese-American author Cathy Bao Bean (Chopsticks-Fork Principle) from NJ. Members of Maturiza group formally opened the ceremony just after 12:30 PM and promptly mesmerized the audience with a twenty minute performance of

their drums.

As usual there were henna hand decorations, face painting for kids, Chinese and Japanese calligraphy writing demonstrations. The member organization also distributed information about their activities and answered questions about their countries to a large group of local Girls Scouts. There were martial arts and Falun Gong demonstrations at the demonstration stage and numerous cultural performances at the main stage. US Census Bureau which was one of the major sponsors of the event had a big booth distributing information about the upcoming 2010 Census and answered questions from the crowd. All in all, experiencing Asian culture in Tallahassee during the last weekend was as easy as a walk in the park!



Thayumanasamy Somasundaram, originally from India is Chair-Elect for the Asian Coalition of Tallahassee. He has been a Tallahassee resident since 1993.

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