

## Q & A WITH THERESA PAN HOSLEY

*TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.*

*This month's feature: **Theresa Pan Hosley**, a founder and president of the Tacoma Chinese Reconciliation Foundation.*



Theresa Pan Hosley is a founder and president of the Tacoma Chinese Reconciliation Foundation which was established in 1994 to develop and oversee the Chinese Reconciliation Park on Schuster Parkway. The Chinese garden motif allows the park to stand as a living memorial of the forceful expulsion of the Chinese population from Tacoma on Nov. 3, 1885. It is also an educational tool to prevent the recurrence of similar events and a place to celebrate Tacoma's multicultural past, present, and future.

### **Q: What are the key elements of the park?**

A: Its purpose is to inform and also inspire. Visitors to the park can find out about Chinese sojourners who made their way to live and work in Tacoma, mainly to complete the Northern Pacific Railroad line from Kalama to its western terminus at Commencement Bay, and (who) later encountered civic injustice. The expulsion was an act of exclusion in response to complex conditions of the time, among them economic decline and anti-Chinese sentiment. The park is an act of reconciliation and inclusivity toward the people of diverse legacies and interests who are part of the city as a dynamic community. The pathways and structures thus provide a place for contemplation but also renewal.

One important part of the park is a structure that in itself is a landmark, the Fuzhou Ting. A ting is a small pavilion or open-walled building that is a gift to the city for the park from the City of Fuzhou, Fujian province, China. The Fuzhou Ting is an act of friendship between Fuzhou and Tacoma in recognition of their Sister City relationship. It grew from a meeting in Fuzhou between a delegation from Tacoma and the deputy mayor of Fuzhou. Chinese engineers constructed the ting in Fuzhou and then disassembled it for shipment to Tacoma. With the leadership and hard work provided by a team of three senior Chinese construction engineers and an interpreter sent from Fuzhou in the summer 2010, the reconstruction of the ting on site in the park is a particularly vivid representation of the park as a significant space of commemoration and reconciliation.

### **Q: Why is this park located along Commencement Bay, how did it come about, and why is it important for Tacoma's history?**

A: Dr. David Murdoch formally submitted a suggestion in 1991 to the City of Tacoma in response to its call for ideas about the development of the waterfront. (He) proposed a plan

to recognize and reconcile the expulsion as an act of disharmony in the history of Tacoma. Specifically, he suggested the establishment of a waterfront park with a Chinese cultural motif in a place not far from where houses and shops of most Chinese in Tacoma had stood at water's edge before the expulsion and the property destruction that came in its wake.

During more than a year of regular meetings under the auspices of the City, a committee formed a vision of reconciliation to advance Tacoma into the future as a community sustained by an ideal of civic harmony among people of many heritages. This vision included first and foremost the creation of the park, which would commemorate the Chinese expulsion event of the past and also look ahead to the future as a Tacoma landmark with ever new meaning in changing times. Alongside the development of the park as a significant public space would be efforts, as appropriate, to educate the Tacoma community about the exclusion of the Chinese and to promote multicultural inclusiveness.

On Nov. 30, 1993, the Tacoma City Council approved a resolution to allocate \$25,000 for preliminary planning of the park on the former Washington State National Guard site along the waterfront near Old Town. A brief formal ceremony in August 1996 officially marked the transfer of the land to the reconciliation park project. The park site is less than one-half mile from the former Chinese settlement along the water close to the downtown Tacoma site called Old Canton. In June 2006, (representatives from ) the city council, the Chinese Reconciliation Project, the World Trade Center, the Port of Tacoma, and the City of Tacoma met with Senior Vice Mayor Liang Jianyong of Fuzhou, China, to discuss the project. The vice mayor ... made a generous offer to donate a ting – valued at \$300,000 -- for the site. The Fuzhou Ting, the first building in the park, was completed in 2011.

**Q: What brings you to your work as president of the Chinese Reconciliation Foundation Board?**

A: I am committed to this community and what happened historically. I wish the community to look at what happens now differently from the way things were done 130 years ago.

**Q: What is the nature of your role with this project?**

A: My job is to interact with people about the project and to reach out beyond the Chinese community.

**Q: What are the most urgent issues you face with this project?**

A: Continuing to raise the money for meeting the budget is primary for me. Having the Tacoma City Council understand it, take it seriously, and carry it through. The community realizing the potential for a community meeting center on this site—one that can house events, welcome foreign students, serve as a site for learning culture, and have a multipurpose use.

**Q: After 22 years with this project, what is the change that you imagine creating?**

A: That in the future the Tacoma community would stand up when there is a discussion of action against a particular group.

**Q: Is there a moment you can recall that changed your outlook on what you are doing with this project?**

A: Yes, when media and others started to call me at the beginning. The original idea was to put a plaque at the site to indicate what had happened. People who called said a plaque does not mean a whole lot to us and does not reflect what happened.

**Q: What is the most unexpected thing that has happened to you in this work?**

A: The honorary doctorate degree from the University of Puget Sound in May 2015. It was a total surprise.

**Q: What inspires you?**

A: The support of the city of Tacoma for this project

**Q: What events or moments in your background led you to involvement in this project?**

A: A sense of responsibility and a sense of making the city of Tacoma a better place for everyone.

**Q: Which people/experiences have influenced you most in this work?**

A: My two children. From my protective feeling for them, I continue to ask myself how I will prevent something like an expulsion from happening again. An inspiring moment was the September 2015 visit to the park of Minister Qiu Yuanping, Head of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State. The event was enthusiastically supported by the community, with attendees and representatives from (various Tacoma organizations). The Fuzhou Ting had been freshly painted and restored to its pristine condition over the summer thanks to the support of our Sister City, Fuzhou. We were proud of it.

**Q: What future projects do you have in mind?**

A: KBTC is slated to produce a documentary about the Chinese expulsion in Tacoma and we are helping to publish Lorraine Barker Hildebrand's book *Straw Hat, Sandals, and Steel: The Chinese in Washington State*.