

Youngsters Celebrate Chinese New Year At CMEE

BY BRANDI BUCHMAN



Children made origami rabbits at a Chinese New Year celebration on Saturday at the Children's Museum of the East End in Bridgehampton.

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Bright red envelopes filled with sweet surprises, dozens of hanging paper lanterns, baskets of oranges and plenty of crunchy fortune cookies were all part of the fun at a "Chinese New Year Celebration" held on Saturday at the Children's Museum of the East End (CMEE) in Bridgehampton.

More than a dozen children were in attendance for the celebration. And under the organization of the museum's Communications Coordinator, Eliza Rand, and led by Ross School ESL instructor Mami Tekada, participants learned a basic phrase in Mandarin, listened to a story that chronicled the history of the Chinese zodiac, created colorful origami rabbits (2011 is the Year of the Rabbit) and listened to traditional Chinese music while enjoying tea and fortune cookies.

Ms. Rand, whose two daughters Nina, 10, and Ellie, 8, were adopted from China, said she believes there is vital significance to offering programs such as the Chinese New Year celebration to East End families.

"Exposure to different cultures early on is important," she said. "Several children participating in today's program are Chinese, my daughters included, and I think that this lets them keep a connection to their culture," she said.

Ms. Tekada led the "Chinese New Year Celebration" program at CMEE this year, as she has

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in years past. She began with a brief introduction to Mandarin. Raising and lowering her hand, she led children through the pitch and intonation of a certain familiar phrase. In unison, children repeated back "*Xin Nian Hao*," which translates to "Happy New Year" in English.

Afterward, Ms. Tekada helped clear up any confusion about the Chinese calendar with a reading of "Story of the Chinese Zodiac," by Monica Chang and Rick Charette; which explained the different animals represented in the ancient calendar. But before reading the book, she led children in a lively discussion about the types of animals, and their roles, in the Chinese zodiac.

"Which animal comes first in the zodiac?" she asked.

One of the children responded

that he thought a tiger would be the first animal in the zodiac, because "tigers are the fastest!"

Children then made origami rabbits, folding and bending sheets of construction paper with the help of a nearby friend or parent. Passing around a basket of crayons, Ms. Takeda noted, "Kids really enjoy interacting and being hands-on, so I always try to come up with different interactive ideas. Last year we made dumplings, this year, origami rabbits," she smiled.

Toward the end of the program, each child received a symbolic "*hong bao*," or red envelope.

"In China, children everywhere receive these envelopes as a gift in celebration of the New Year," Ms. Takeda said. "They are usually filled with money or coins. Today, everyone will find a special treat inside."

The children then excitedly

fished out chocolate coins from within the envelope's bright red folds. As could be expected, the chocolate treats were a big hit.

The annual "Chinese New Year Celebration" is one that continues to grow in popularity at CMEE, according to Ms. Rand. She added that the celebration, like much of the CMEE programming, allows children a chance to learn about a place or culture that they might not otherwise be aware.

"The Chinese New Year workshop event is a reflection all of our programming decisions. We strive to appeal to the diversity of families and residents in our community," she said. "It's important, we think, to expose children to other cultures. And we like to think of CMEE as being a meeting place for all community members living on the East End and beyond."