



The Year of the Rat

■ Three City Departments welcome the Chinese New Year.

By Yvonne Liu, Office of Finance, Club Member

One function that all City departments share is our commitment to public service. Sometimes public service means educating the public, furthering cultural exchange and understanding, and stimulating the local economy. In February, three City departments did these things by celebrating the Chinese Lunar New Year.

Chinese New Year began Feb. 7.

The Chinese zodiac dates back to 2,600 BC and is based on lunar cycles, which means the starting date of each year varies between late January and mid-February. Lunar year 4706 began on Feb. 7. This year is the Year of the Rat, the beginning of the zodiac cycle of the 12 venerable beasts.



Central Library Senior Librarian Madeline Bryant reads the story, *Cat and the Rat*.



Library

On Feb. 2, Senior Librarian Madeline Bryant and Librarian Joanna Fabicon performed a storytelling program titled "Groundhog Presents Year of the Rat" at the Los Angeles Central Library. Madeline is one of five librarians in the Children's Literature Department who designs and implements the storytelling program from 2 to 3 p.m. every Saturday. The program for Feb. 2 incorporated a variety of Groundhog Day stories and Chinese Lunar New Year stories. One such story Madeline brought to life was *Cat and the Rat* by Ed Young, a story on the origin of the order of the Chinese zodiac and why the cat and the rat are enemies to this day.

The program filled all 63 seats with children and their parents.

"It is hard to find a story short enough on Chinese New Year to read aloud" Madeline said.

"We try not to put an age group on our children's program," she continued. The librarians plan the programs with some short, simple picture books and some longer, more involved stories so to appeal to a variety of children's ages. This way, parents are reminded to read aloud to their children beyond the pre-reading age. She recommends Jim Trelease's *The Read*

Aloud Handbook as an excellent resource for parents and caregivers who want to share the gift of reading with children.

Librarian Wanda Fong of the Chinatown Branch Library juggled even more activities during February. From Feb. 1 to 23, she told Chinese New Year stories, hosted a Chinese calligraphy demonstration, and invited Miss Chinatown and her court for a visit.

"Usually, we have a Chinese knotting and Chinese lantern making program to celebrate the Chinese New Year," Wanda said. She has been with the Chinatown Library since the grand opening in February 1997.

"I think the children are really lucky to celebrate Chinese New Year," Wanda continued. "It is a joyous and festive holiday for them -- they receive 'lai see' [lucky red envelopes]. As my children were growing, they were very anxious to see the 'Grand Dragon New Year's Parade.' That tradition still continues today. It is also a time for family gatherings -- good food (the preparation of the food) and fellowship," she said.

Zoo

The Los Angeles Zoo celebrated the Chinese Lunar New Year on Feb. 9 and 10 with martial arts demonstrations, Asian foods, festive music and a special educational program on rodents. Gina Dartt, the Zoo's Promotions Coordinator for the last seven years, took two months to prepare for the weekend event that drew more than 24,000 visitors over two days. That's a record

breaker over the usual 8,000 visitors per day. The Chinese Lunar New Year is one of eight celebrations, including Black History Month and Reindeer Romp, that she prepares annually.

Gina, who is familiar with all 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, said, "We try to highlight and work in the animal of the year into our educational program."

"I was glad that we found five rodents, including the guinea pig and the prairie dog, to join the program," she said. "These are animals that visitors would otherwise miss out on [during a regular visit]."

El Pueblo/Olvera Street

El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument is not only the birthplace of the City of Los Angeles, but also the home to the Chinese American Museum. This historical traditional site of Los Angeles' first Chinatown has hosted the Lantern Festival since 2001. This year's festival took place Feb. 23. All activities were free to the public; the Lantern Festival traditionally marks the official closing of the Lunar New Year period, which lasts 15 days.

The one-day festival includes family-oriented programs including stage performances, art workshops on Chinese lantern making, children's workshops and water coloring demonstrations.

The festival has customarily drawn more than 12,000 event participants every year. This year, book signings by two popular Chinese American authors added a special touch to the educational program. Award-winning author Icy Smith, along with the book's illustrator, Gayle Garner Roski, debuted her first children's book, *Mei Ling in China City*, based on an 80-year-old woman's experience in Los Angeles' "China City" during World War II. In celebration of this year's astrological animal and the qualities of those born under this sign,



A lantern at the Lantern Festival, an event celebrating the Chinese New Year at the El Pueblo Historical Monument.



Celebrating Chinese New Year at the Los Angeles Zoo.

Oliver Chin introduced the third book in his Chinese zodiac animal series, *Year of the Rat*, which follows the adventures of a baby rat named Ralph.

El Pueblo Historical Monument's General Manager, Robert L. Andrade, said, "We are very proud to be part of this wonderful festival."

"The Chinese American Museum staff does a fantastic job in organizing the Lantern Festival. The festival brings together families from all over Southern California and is a very popular event."

"This is a wonderful opportunity, at a family-oriented venue to learn of and share with all our neighbors the Chinese culture."



The Lantern Festival at El Pueblo Historical Monument.



Celebrating Chinese New Year at the Los Angeles Zoo.

