



PIGEON POST

Essays and poetry wanted

CULTURE

Taipei City's Department of Labor is inviting foreign workers to take part in the 2009 Foreign Workers' Poetry & Essay Writing Competition to share their experiences of living in Taiwan. The contest is open to all foreign workers in Taiwan, and participants can submit their entries in any language. The winners of the "Poetry" and "Essay" categories will receive NT\$10,000 prizes, and award-winning entries will be published in an anthology the department said. The word limit for the "Essay" category is 1,000 words. Submissions to the competition must be postmarked no later than April 30. Those interested in entering the contest should include their full name, address, passport number, telephone number, one photo and a short biography along with their work, and mail the package to Foreign Workers Counseling Service Center, 8F, No. 21, Section 1, Dihua Street, Taipei City 103. For more information call (02)2550-7229 or 2550-2151, ext. 212-214

Kaohsiung bureau seeks jobs for locals

LABOR

A total of 13,392 foreign workers remain employed in Kaohsiung City, and companies forcing local workers to take unpaid leave will be targeted by the city to help ease the rising jobless rate, the city's Bureau of Labor Affairs said on Thursday. The local manufacturing industry has the largest number of foreign workers, 6,502, followed by the care giving sector with 5,896 employees, statistics compiled by the bureau show. The highest number of foreign workers, 5,666, are from Indonesia, followed by the Philippines with 5,003, Vietnam with 2,365, and Thailand with 1,358, the figures show. To fight a growing jobless rate brought about by the ongoing economic downturn, the city's labor affairs bureau has demanded that companies employ more local workers to fill new job vacancies, and that they repatriate foreign workers upon expiry of their contracts, bureau officials said. Several high-tech companies repatriated their foreign workers at the beginning of the year following this order, the bureau said.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA



IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR EVENTS, INTERVIEWS OR TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE COVERED ON THIS PAGE PLEASE SEND YOUR IDEAS TO: community@taipeitimes.com

Lantern festival leaves foreign guests impressed

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

It might have been raining on Saturday night, but for the 79 foreign ambassadors and representatives and their families in attendance, the weather in no way dampened their spirits as they took part in the annual Sky Lantern Festival in Taipei County's Pingxi Township (平溪).

"I am so impressed with everything. This is very beautiful," said Abdullah Mohd Salleh, president of the Malaysian Friendship and Trade Centre, saying he had never seen anything like it before.

The distinguished guests, invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were among the 200 people that released lanterns with President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) that night.

Each country's representative was given a rainbow colored lantern symbolizing the different cultures and peoples of the world.

Ma, accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Francisco Ou (歐鴻鍊) and Burkina Faso Ambassador Jacques Sawadogo, the dean of the diplomatic corps, released a 6m-high lantern decorated with a world map.

According to legend, during feuds between Chinese settlers and Aborigines a century ago, male villagers used to release sky lanterns at nightfall to signal to their wives and children that it was safe to come.

Over the years, the launching of sky lanterns has become a major festive activity in Taiwan, especially around the Lunar New Year period, with people writing wishes and prayers on lanterns for the upcoming year before releasing them

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— Abdullah Mohd Salleh, president of the Malaysian Friendship and Trade Centre

into the skies.

Participating in the celebration for the first time, the Holy See's charge d'affaires, Monsignor Paul Fitzpatrick Russell, said: "I hope God will listen to all the prayers going up today and send His blessings, especially of peace on Earth."

Salvadoran Ambassador Francisco Santana Berrios wrote on his lantern in Chinese characters, "May the friendship between the Republic of Taiwan and El Salvador remain strong and lasting."

With his wife and two young sons, Commercial Office of Peru in Taipei Director Gyes Gordon said his family was blown away by the beauty of the lanterns as they illuminated the sky.

"We are all very impressed. My two young sons were totally fascinated," he said, adding that his family was ecstatic when they located Peru on the main lantern.

"I wished for a healthy baby because my wife is pregnant with our third child which will be born in Taiwan in April. It was also the first thing my wife wrote," he said.

Showing Taiwan to the world

FROM DEVON TO TAMSUI: Long-time Taipei resident Samson Ellis has brought an English voice to Formosa TV's news, as well as writing a series of documentaries for the Discovery Channel presenting stories from Taiwan to an international audience

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER

Like any journalist or writer, Englishman Samson Ellis appreciates a good story no matter how unusual or strange. Taiwan certainly has its fair share.

"Do you remember the exploding sperm whale?" he says.

Ellis, editor-in-chief of English news at Formosa TV (FTV, 民視), remembers when his station covered the story of the 17m-long, 50-tonne sperm whale that died after being stranded on a beach.

The creature's body burst open while being transported through Tainan, bringing traffic to a halt as it splattered cars and passersby with blood and guts.

"Stuff like that — that's Taiwan," he says laughing.

While he relishes such stories that spice up the typical news cycle, Ellis has also been exploring some lesser-known tales about Taiwan. Last year he wrote a series of one-hour documentaries that aired at the end of last year on the Discovery Channel.

There are no exploding animals in *Unknown Taiwan*, but the series offers enough intrigue to engage both local and international viewers. In an episode on Tamsui, two historians set out to try to find the fabled secret tunnels extending from the Dutch-built Fort San Domingo (紅毛城) to Keelung.

Another episode looks at the coastline of Penghu, the site of numerous maritime disasters and plane crashes, and entertains the existence of a Bermuda Triangle-like phenomenon near the island.

In his role as scriptwriter, Ellis said he tried to draw out elements of Taiwan that had universal appeal.

"When you're writing for the Discovery Channel especially, you've always got to be thinking, okay, why should some guy in Mexico be watching this?" he says. "You're really writing for a global international audience, so that's always on your mind."

The series also tells the story of a Japanese pilot who was born and raised in Hualien and served in a Japanese air force squadron secretly stationed on Taiwan during World War II. Just before the pilot was about to embark on his ultimate mission, a kamikaze raid, the war ended. The show documents the pilot's visit to his childhood home and school in Hualien.

In addition to gaining an appreciation for Taiwan's colonial history and Aboriginal roots, Ellis says he enjoys the "craft" aspect of making the documentaries: creating narratives that could "really sustain people, and people from anywhere, for an hour."

The idea of keeping people's attention brought him back to basics in working with the Taiwanese production companies that were commissioned by Discovery and the Government Information Office to produce the shows.

According to Ellis, *Unknown Taiwan* marked the first time that Discovery had a writer involved during the early planning stages for its programs produced by local production houses.

He said one challenge was to help

the production companies think in terms of a global audience.

"I was very adamant — okay, you need a lot of maps [in the shows]. First of all, you need to tell people where the hell Taiwan is — a lot of people aren't going to know where Taiwan is," he says.

"You're trying to reach out to people who aren't interested in Taiwan with an interesting story about Taiwan. So you've got to give lots of basic information, stuff like what were the Japanese doing [there]?" he says.

Ellis' own interest in Taiwan goes back to his student days and an enthusiasm for languages. The 32-year-old from Devon spent his high school years in Germany, where he became fluent in German and learned French, and studied at the University of Edinburgh, where he received his master's degree in Chinese.

A year abroad at National Taiwan Normal University during his university days encouraged Ellis to return to Taiwan to live and work at the end of 2001. Intending to stay for just one year, he ended up working at the English daily *Taiwan News* for several years before moving to FTV.

What has kept Ellis in Taiwan and at FTV is the fast-paced and intense environment of the television newsroom.

"It's never boring, every day's different — there's just so many possibilities, especially when you've got to condense everything into a small show," he said. "You've got to be so succinct, there's no room, there's no time and there's no space for any extraneous information and so writing for TV is a real skill...it's



Samson Ellis smiles in this photo taken on Jan. 23 in Taipei.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

one I didn't appreciate when I went there [FTV]."

While the show may not appear as slick as an international news program, Ellis said that local organizations are taking notice and over the past several years, the program has been nominated for a number of awards.

Ellis continues to work for Discovery and also writes for the channel's popular program *Fun Taiwan* (瘋台灣), collaborating with his friend and the show's presenter,

Janet Hsieh (謝怡芬). He is also working on a documentary to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 9/21 earthquake.

In between eight-hour work days at FTV and writing for Discovery programs, Ellis still finds the time to play soccer in several local leagues and mountain biking.

And he would rather be busy working than idle.

"I know myself... if I didn't do it, I'd be sitting at home watching TV," he said.



LATIN LESSONS

El Salvadorian student Alfonso, second right, and Panamanian student Yuriela, third right, teach students at Hsinle Elementary School in Hsinchu County's Chienshih Township to speak English in this photo taken last Tuesday.

PHOTO: WANG CHIN-YI, TAIPEI TIMES

Pizza TV advertisement brings Funshine to Taiwan

SPEAKING IN TONGUES: Although he can speak Mandarin well, clients for his voice-overs often ask Brian Funshine to speak in 'funny foreigner Chinese'

BY DAN BLOOM
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Remember those TV commercials for Domino's Pizza that had a cute tagline that went "DaMeiLe, DaLeMei"?

Well the man in those commercials was Scott Oelkers — a middle-aged former Mormon missionary in Taiwan who stayed on to lead the company to nationwide success before selling the firm and moving on.

Now the torch has been passed, and another foreigner, a 34-year-old musician and voice-over actor with the stage name of Brian Funshine, is the new voice behind the brand's latest TV ads. In a recent e-mail interview, Funshine was asked how he got the job and what it was like doing the voice acting — in Chinese.

Funshine, who also goes by the

name of Brian Alexander, hails from Florida and has been in Taiwan for about nine years. A former English teacher who married a Taiwanese woman, he said he got the pizza job from a referral by a studio where he had done earlier voice-over projects, including ads for Volvo, Harley Davidson and Via Technologies.

"The pizza commercial just dropped in my lap by a lucky chance, and from earlier work I had done with an agency in Taipei," he said.

When asked how a foreigner prepares for a voice-over gig assignment like this, Funshine, who speaks Chinese, said: "Well, of course, my Taiwanese wife helped me make sure that my pronunciation was correct, and also, I practiced and rehearsed a lot, and I was also able to use a few voice-over acting techniques that

I've learned from earlier work."

"Interacting with clients for me involves speaking Chinese, and I need to speak Chinese since clients don't speak English," he said. "It's a very competitive and difficult market in the advertising business."

Although he can speak Mandarin well and knows his tones, Funshine said that some of his Taiwanese clients want him to speak Chinese with a bad accent on purpose.

"It's funny, but some clients actually want me to use 'bad pronunciation,' I guess because it adds humor to the commercial for Taiwanese viewers," he said. "For example, in the pizza commercial, in the phrase 'Da Mei Le'... the first character, 'Da,' should be said with a rising second tone, but I was told to do it using the first tone. The company wanted me to intentionally sound more foreign."

"Many clients want what I call 'funny foreigner Chinese.' So, I just



Brian Funshine records a voice-over in a Taipei studio in this undated photo.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BRIAN FUNSHINE

do it many different ways with my tones intentionally incorrect and let them pick what they like best!" he said.

Statistics show fewer Taiwanese marrying foreigners

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

The number of weddings involving partners of different nationalities fell to 14 percent of all marriages in Taiwan in last year, continuing a decline that began in 2004, the latest statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior last month show.

Last year, 21,729 Taiwanese tied the knot with foreign nationals — 2,971 fewer than in 2007.

The ratio of marriages involving partners of mixed nationality as a percentage of the total has been falling every year since 2004 after reaching its peak in 2003, when 31.9 percent of all marriages in Taiwan were between a Republic of China (ROC) citizen and a foreign national.

PROSTITUTES

Ministry officials attributed the decline in part to government efforts to crack down on marriages of convenience used to bring women into the country for prostitution.

In terms of the distribution of nationalities, 59 percent of the foreign spouses who married Taiwanese last year came from China, Hong Kong and Macau, followed by 28 percent from Southeast Asian countries, ministry statistics showed.

A total of 18,213 foreign women married Taiwanese men over last year, accounting for 83.8 percent of the total of foreign spouses who married ROC citizens.

FOREIGN BRIDES

In terms of nationality, 66.7 percent of the foreign brides were from China, Hong Kong or Macau, followed by 22 percent from Vietnam and 4.4 percent from Indonesia.

Close to a quarter of the male foreign nationals who married Taiwanese women last year were from Japan, with 17.7 percent from China, Hong Kong and Macau, ministry tallies showed.

Those from the US ranked third and made up 14.6 percent of the total.