

## Dances with lions

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

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### TRENDING

#### Honoring Bill Lunney

Bill Lunney is retiring after more than 50 years of environmental and government advocacy. His legacy will last for generations.

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#### A rotten year

A lot people in Madison are wondering what the hell is happening in our schools. Even Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham has called it a “trying year.” Isthmus talked to nearly 30 teachers to find out what’s happening behind the scenes.

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#### Millennial magnet



VICTORIA DAVIS

**The dance team from the Colorado Asian Cultural Heritage Center won third place in the lion dance at the national competition held in Madison last week.**

The competition begins with the ringing of a gong.

Seventeen teams from across the country begin circling the arena, waving the red, blue, green, yellow, and pink flags of their Kung Fu schools. Hundreds of audience members cheer as

Many come for the university of well-paid jobs in the health or tech sectors. Whatever their motivation, young adults are moving to Madison by the tens of thousands.

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## Edgewood offered to “coordinate messaging” on lawsuit with mayor

In the days before Edgewood High School filed suit against the city of Madison for religious discrimination, one of the school’s lawyers offered to coordinate with the city how the lawsuit would be explained to the public.

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## Nails’ Tales bails

Opinions on “Nails’ Tales” ran from loathing to indifference. But with no political controversy behind the work, the statue didn’t engender a public fight.

## ISTHMUS Newsletters

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EMAIL ADDRESS

Chinese lions wearing bells, sequins and lights dance in Monona’s Terrace’s Exhibition Hall for the opening ceremony of the Second National Dragon & Lion Dance Championships.

This two-day competition, which started with the traditional lion dance on June 29, is the only one of its kind in the states. Madison’s Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association joins teams from California, Colorado, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, Texas and Washington.

“We see lion dancing as sort of an outreach to the community, where we help them celebrate martial arts culture,” says Nelson Ferreira, president of the United States Dragon & Lion Dance Federation and founder of the Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association. “With a big competition like this, we get to share that experience with people from all over the U.S.”

The lion dance — where two performers in a lion costume creatively tell a hero’s story of triumph in hardship — is an ancient art performed during the Chinese New Year, other Asian cultural festivals and weddings. Lion dancing is popular throughout Asia, but especially in Malaysia and Singapore.

“You’ll find the best masters in the world there,” says Andrea Fernandez, Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association’s team captain who has studied in Singapore with Ferreira under Chan Siew Kee, founder and third generation chairman of World Sar Ping Lion Dance Federation.

Fernandez, who is the lion’s head in one of the team’s two traditional lion dance performances, has been studying lion dancing for seven years.

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**Andrea Fernandez (top, as the lion head) and Ong Lee Ping (bottom, as the tail) compete for Madison's Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association at the Second National Dragon & Lion Dance Championships.**

“It’s challenging,” says Fernandez. “To be good at it, you can’t just be good at one thing. People can get away with not being good at all the moves in Kung Fu but with lion dance you have to have it all. It teaches you how to use your entire body.”

“Plus I like the music,” Fernandez adds. In each performance, a team of musicians accompanies the dancers. A tanggu drum, a gong and cymbals provide sound effects for the lion’s martial arts moves.

Accompanying Fernandez as the lion’s tail is 26-year-old Ong Lee Ping, who has been part of Ferreira’s Kung Fu association for a year.

While Ping was training in Kung Fu, he unexpectedly fell into lion dancing just three weeks before last year’s championships in Boston.

“I was doing a leg sweep during our sparring practice and I pushed the guy who was going to be the tail over my knee and we both fell,” says Ping. “He busted his knee and I felt really bad so I volunteered to take his spot.”

Ping became the team’s dependable tail and the manpower behind the lion’s jumps and lifts. “I have to remain steady while [Andrea] is on top of my head,” said Ping. “So I hope that trust is there!”

“It is,” responds Fernandez.

Fernandez and Ping suit up to tell their story, “A Crack in the Boulder.” They become one in a gold and black lion costume, synchronizing every motion like rings on a slinky. In this story, the lion sees a flower in the crack of a large boulder and must brave a giant centipede in order to reach the “flower of immortality,” as Ferreira explains.

After battling a large rubber bug, Ping and Fernandez fly through the air as they leap up the mounds of a boulder. Reaching the top the lion grabs the flower in its jaws then spits it back out.

“The lion is the agent of transformation,” says Ferreira. “It eats the flower, but expels fortune onto the people. It’s not about just conquering the journey, it’s also about sharing the reward with everybody as a balance.”

In celebration of its victory, the lion performs a “two-legged” dance on the boulder, with Fernandez on top of Ping’s head. The crowd goes wild.

While they didn’t finish in the top three, Fernandez and Ping were congratulated by Chan Siew Kee who came from Singapore to watch them compete.

“There’s a huge emphasis on achieving your goals in these stories, and that’s what we’re doing here,” says Ping.

Fernandez adds, “We will dance until our bodies give out.”

**Two:** Performers in a lion dance

**Nine:** Performers in a dragon dance

**“Chinese Southern Lion”:** Costume used in traditional lion dances

**“Zhong Yi, Jiayou!”:** Madison’s team cheer before a performance, which means “Let’s go!”

**Zero:** Wild lions in China

CHINESE DANCING



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## COMMENTS

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