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Hang Ah Hillside Cultural Center: In the Heart of San Francisco's Chinatown

Hang Ah Hillside, a non-profit cultural center located in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown and business district, promotes the well-rounded development of women and girls, with the goal of strengthening their families and enriching their communities.

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On Saturday, three times a month, promptly at 10:00 a.m., small groups of 3rd through 7th grade girls from neighborhoods around San Francisco arrive at a modest brick building on a steep Chinatown hill. A block up from tourist-filled Grant Avenue and California Street's clanging cable cars, the girls hurry in, books in hand, to look for their tutors and quickly settle into their study areas for an hour-long individual tutoring session. One tackles math problems, while another reads out loud and is tested on comprehension. Each one receives the encouragement and personal attention of a committed tutor. These tutors are professional women and older students who volunteer their time to serve as mentors to the girls throughout the year.

In addition to their academic work, the tutors and girls speak about how the week has gone and of other concerns the girls might have. They review and update the personal and academic goals the girls have set for themselves, and consider together practical tips on how to put these goals into practice. Finally, a staff member gives the whole group a character development talk; and everyone joins together to share a snack before dispersing into the packed Saturday-morning Chinatown streets.

Hang Ah Hillside, a non-profit cultural center located in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown and business district, promotes the well-rounded development of women and girls, with the goal of strengthening their families and enriching their communities. The idea of the center grew out of an ongoing tutoring program started in 1996 by long-time

Chinatown residents Mrs. Cion Nepomuceno and Ms. Genny Berry, at Old St. Mary's School in the neighborhood. Their dream to expand their work from children to women and families was realized in 1999, when the two-story building at the current address was purchased and renovations were begun with the help of an anonymous donor.

The new location was inaugurated in January 2004 with bilingual (Chinese-English) festivities including a traditional Chinese Lion Dance and a multimedia review of the tutoring program. The Keynote address by Ms. Sharon Hefferan, Executive Director of Metro Achievement Center Chicago, spurred all present to dream about the future of this center in the service of the Chinatown and the greater San Francisco Bay Area. Its central location –within blocks of the Financial District, Union Square and

Nob Hill- gives it a wider reach. The newly renovated space, including individual tutoring rooms and a library as well as common meeting area, enables Hang Ah Hillside to offer additional programs to further benefit students as well as professional women and parents seeking the necessary orientation and resources to help them achieve a more successful work-life balance and more effective parenting skills.

Hang Ah Hillside's flagship activity is the REACH Tutoring Program, which aims to help girls excel in Math, Science, English and other academic subjects. While academic excellence is a primary goal of the REACH Tutoring Program, it is not the only one. Hang Ah is inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, a personal Prelature of the Catholic Church which encourages people to practice Christian virtues in their families,

work and friendships. Of great importance at Hang Ah Hillside is the character development of those who participate in its programs. The staff organizes complementary activities – talks, cultural outings, arts and crafts or culinary classes- designed to develop a well-balanced personality grounded in virtue and human values.

Other programs offered at Hang Ah Hillside include after-work cultural events for professionals, such as a series of discussions on Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body as well as family enrichment and practical parenting seminars. Additionally, volunteer opportunities are available for women of all ages. For the last two years, Hang Ah Hillside has taken part in the annual Chinatown Community Street Fair, once with a booth highlighting the center's activities and most recently by hosting an Open House. "We have

met many of the neighbors and have learned much about the fascinating and contributing in some small way to the rich history and noteworthy achievements of all those who have achieved so much in the service of this community”, says Ruth Mercado, project coordinator.

Hang Ah Hillside Cultural Center

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