

A LOOK AHEAD

For more events and more activities this week and beyond in the area, see Area Activities on the Happenings page, C6.

This Week

Auburn

DeKalb High School choirs will present their **CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR** shows today at 2 and 4:30 p.m. in the school's renovated auditorium with new lighting, stage floor and sound system.

Fort Wayne

The Heartland Chamber Chorale will continue **"A HEARTLAND HOLIDAY"** today at 4 p.m. in the sanctuary of Fort Wayne's Plymouth Congregational Church UCC. Ticket prices begin at \$20 for members and \$24 for advance sales. Special prices are offered to students with identification. Children under 12 are admitted free. For more information, call 436-8080 or (866) 745-7013 or visit www.HeartlandChorale.org.

Sesame Street Live, **"WHEN ELMO GROWS UP,"** at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum continues today at 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$13 and \$16. A limited number of \$20 premium seats and \$25 gold circle seats are available. Tickets are available at www.ticketmaster.com, or by calling 424-1811. For more information, call 482-9502.

The First Presbyterian Theater, 300 W. Wayne St., Fort Wayne, continues to present **"IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE"** Dec. 14, 15, 21 and 22 at 8 p.m. and today, Dec. 16 and 23 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$16 for general admission and \$14 for seniors over age 60 and young audience members under 23. A preview performance will take place Nov. 29 at 7:30 p.m. when all tickets will coast \$8. Reservations are not taken for the preview performance and tickets are available on a first come, first served basis. Call 422-6329 for tickets or information.

Kendallville

WINDMILL WINTER WONDERLAND from 5:30-8:30 p.m. today at the Mid-America Windmill Museum on Allen Chapel Road (C.R. 1000E). Adults \$2 and children 12 and under free. Light displays, refreshments, and gifts.

LaGrange

A **BENEFIT** will be held Saturday at the LaGrange Moose Lodge for cancer victim Pat Hickey. The benefit will include a silent auction, raffles, 50-50 drawing, food and entertainment. The event will run from 4-10 p.m. Items for the auction are still being accepted and can be dropped off at Indiana Custom Truck, 2840 N. S.R. 9. For more information, contact Deb Patrick at Indiana Custom Truck at 463-3244 Ext. 103 or 336-4010.

Mongo

The Mongo community will be celebrating **CHRISTMAS** on Friday with a number of activities. Santa and Mrs. Claus will be at the Gazebo in downtown Mongo at 5 p.m. The community Christmas tree (take an ornament for the tree) will be decorated and a lighting ceremony will be held at 6 p.m., followed by caroling around town until 7 p.m. Hot chocolate, chili and entertainment begins at 7 p.m. at the Mongo Fire Station.

Shipshewana

A **CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY PARADE** has been scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday on Morton Street in Shipshewana. Santa is scheduled to be on hand from 10:45 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Courtyard of Arts.

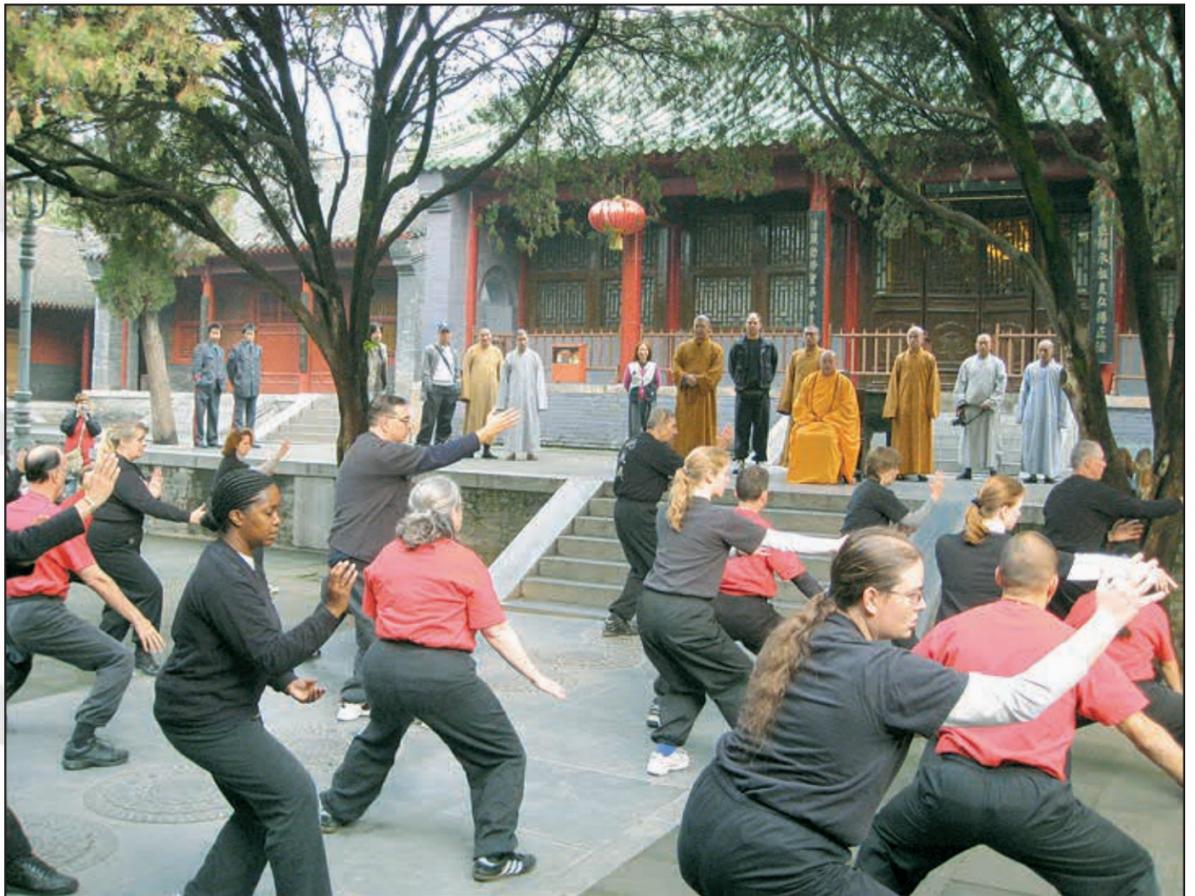
Steuben County

The **13TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS SING-A-LONG** at Wing Haven Nature Preserve, located east of S.R. 127 on C.R. 400W, will be at 2 p.m. today in the Helen Swenson art studio, hosted by Art and Marion Eberhardt.

Right, leaders of the American tour group in China watch a martial arts demonstration with Abbot Shi Yongxin (seated) at the Shaolin Temple. Traveling with Master Shi Guolin, second from left, a 34th generation Shaolin monk who lives in New York, entitled the Americans to VIP treatment. Master Eric Sbarge, in black jacket, heads the American Center for Chinese Studies school in Charlotte, N.C. He is the son of the late Robert Sbarge, former president of the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum and founder of The Changing Dragon ACCS school in 1993. Below, a tour group from the American Center for Chinese Studies demonstrates tai chi and Yi Jin Jing forms for Abbot Shi Yongxin.



MARY SCHMITZ



MARY SCHMITZ

TO THE HEART OF MARTIAL ARTS

Local tai chi students visit China, where it all began

BY DAVE KURTZ
dkurtz@kpcnews.net

For Lori Fox of Auburn, 14 years of practicing tai chi chuan came down to the five-minute performance of her life. On the morning of Oct. 14, Fox awoke in the stark surroundings of The Zen Hotel in Dengfeng, China, in the Song Shan mountains. She walked a long, scenic path to the Shaolin Temple, birthplace of Zen Buddhism and Shaolin Kung Fu 1,500 years ago.

Fox and Greg Vick of Auburn would join 21 other Americans in the temple's courtyard to demonstrate their skills for Abbot Shi Yongxin. "He's like the pope of martial arts, because martial arts got their origin at the Shaolin Temple," Vick said of the abbot.

To Fox, it felt as if "you were on a high school football team and you were asked to play in front of Peyton Manning and Coach (Tony) Dungy" of the champion Indianapolis Colts, she said.

As Fox set foot on the courtyard, she noticed how the morning dew made the slate surface slick.

"We had to concentrate on being very focused, very centered, very rooted so we didn't slip on it," she said.

The demonstration began, with martial arts

武术的心脏

ONLINE:
See more of the photos and video from the group's trip online at www.fwdailynews.com/online_features/video/china.txt



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Tourists from northeast Indiana pose for a photograph in the Forbidden City at Beijing, China. From left are Jane Minick, Susan Fischer, former DeKalb County resident Jay Proescher, Greg Vick, Cathy Vick, Mary Schmitz, Randy Fox, Lori Fox and Mary Raub.



Susan Fischer of Auburn strolls through an alley of food vendors in Zhengzhov, China.

MARY SCHMITZ

Local group sees China's modern, ancient faces

BY DAVE KURTZ
dkurtz@kpcnews.net

The Great Wall, the Silk Road, Tiananmen Square and the Terra Cotta Warriors — eight tourists from northeast Indiana experienced all the highlights on their 12-day tour of China in October. The Hoosiers traveled with the American Center for Chinese Studies, based in Croton on Hudson, N.Y. All eight are instructors or students at The Changing Dragon school of tai chi in Auburn, a branch of ACCS.

The Americans visited China to see the origins of tai chi at the Shaolin Temple, but they saw much more along the way and came home with strong impressions of the world's most populous nation.

Randy Fox of Auburn said he was surprised to find six-lane highways in China's major cities.

"I stereotypically expected a dark, boring kind of place, and instead, if you would go to any major metropolitan city and take out half the cars, put in bicycles and hang Chinese signs on buildings, it would look like downtown Beijing," he said. "It was very modern, superhighways, lots of tall buildings, a lot of renovation, lots of construction going on."

A visit to a section of the Great Wall impressed Jane Minick of Hamilton.

"There was hardly anybody there. It was so cool! We almost had that section of wall to ourselves," Minick said.

The wall presents a challenge to climbers, with steps that vary between 6 and 18 inches in height.

"You had to focus on every step," said Greg Vick of Auburn, one of only three people in the group of 68 Americans who reached the steepest point on the wall at Juyong Pass.

Mary Schmitz of Fort Wayne said her sightseeing highlight was the Terra Cotta Warriors, larger-than-life sculpted soldiers guarding the tomb of an emperor for more than 2,200 years. A farmer digging a well discovered them in 1974.

Schmitz reigned as the shopping champion of the tour group. She bought jade jewelry and silk scarves and pajamas for herself and family members. She shipped home a mahogany table, handmade without the use of nails.

"I just wanted as many memories as I could come back with," Schmitz said.

"The bargaining — that was fun!" she added. "They'd start you out with an outrageous price, and you'd generally get them down to a fairly decent 'best' price they could offer."

The tourists didn't have to enter marketplaces to shop. (Street vendors confronted them constantly.)

"Every time we got off the bus, people were trying to sell you lots and lots of things, and everything was negotiable," Randy Fox said.

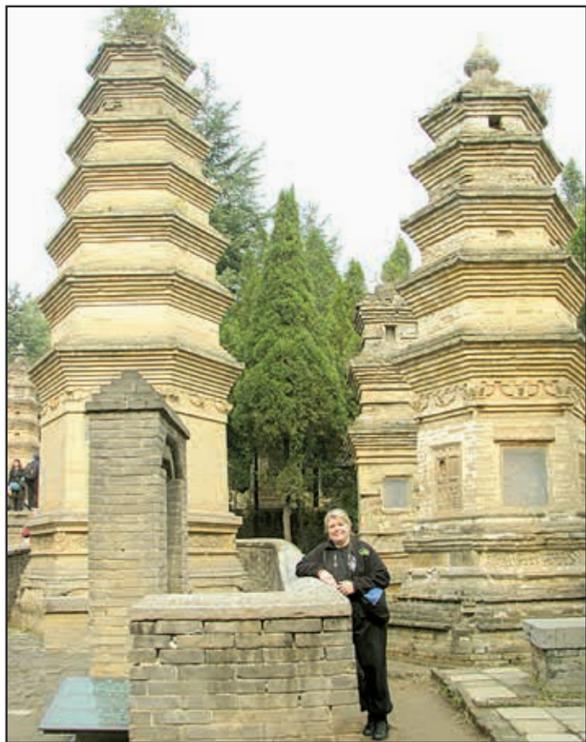
"I was surprised at how capitalistic they are," Lori Fox added. "They'd take us on tours especially to sell us things."

Susan Fischer of Auburn didn't enjoy bartering, but a trip down an alley filled with food vendors made a lasting impression. She described large, square tables piled with food



Cathy and Greg Vick of Auburn prepare for a steep climb on the Great Wall of China at Juyong Pass, northwest of Beijing.

JANE MINICK



Lori Fox of Auburn stands among the pagodas in the Pagoda Forest near the Shaolin Temple outside Dengfeng, China. Nearly 250 pagodas that serve as tombs for monks' ashes were built between the years 618 and 1911.

JANE MINICK

Created 2,200 years ago, thousands of Terra Cotta Warriors guarded the tomb of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of all China. They were discovered in 1974.



JANE MINICK

ready to be cooked in boiling grease.

"The food was not that unusual ... it was a lot of vegetables, a lot of fruit. They use meat as a flavoring ... it's mixed in with other stuff," Fischer said. "Nothing scary at all. ... At one point, I do think I got a bite of octopus."

"The way food is served is really interesting," she added. "Everybody has a ceramic bowl and spoon — a little bowl, a little teacup and a little plate. It

looks almost like a children's serving. ... You take what you want, and you eat it."

Dairy products and breads were scarce, and at almost every meal, the Chinese served watermelon for dessert, Fischer said.

"Across the board, you don't see overweight Chinese," said Greg Vick.

"Their transportation is their physical activity, too," Cathy Vick said. Commuters travel in swarms of bicycles and

scooters.

"Every place was so big. You walked, and walked and walked," said Mary Raub of Auburn. "I was surprised at Tiananmen Square being so huge" in Beijing, she added.

"If you just went to China and sat in that square all day, you'd get a fantastic picture, because there are just tons of things going on" in Tiananmen Square, Fischer said. The swirl of activity included people learning ballroom dancing and line dancing, in addition to martial arts, she added.

Chinese people greeted the Americans warmly.

"There wasn't one person we came across who was anywhere near to being rude," Schmitz said.

"The people were extremely friendly," Minick said. However, she added, "Not many spoke English. Even at the hotels, we struggled."

China will greet huge crowds of visitors soon during the 2008 Olympics.

"There was construction and reconstruction continuously, everywhere" as the nation prepares for the games, Mary Raub said.

Fischer described construction workers scrambling up bamboo lattice scaffolding. "They look like little ants climbing around on the buildings — no helmets, no safety gear," she said.

Several of the tourists remarked on the poor air quality in cities, but the streets are clean, they said.

China's homes seemed plain, "but the parks were gorgeous and pristine and kept up — and the most beautiful flowers," Lori Fox said. "Maybe you didn't live in the best apartment, but you could always go to these gorgeous parks."

"They revere their trees," Minick said. She saw signs proclaiming, "Trees are people's friends."

Minick brought home more than 2,000 digital photographs and videos to remember the journey. Schmitz nearly matched her total.

"It was the trip of a lifetime," Schmitz said. "I'll never forget it, and the reason I took 1,400 photos is so I'll never forget it."

CHINA: Tour includes prestigious Shaolin Kung Fu academy

FROM PAGE C1

students from North Carolina and New York joining the two from Auburn in five rows. Three rows of tai chi performers wore black T-shirts. Between them, two rows of Americans clad in red shirts performed Yi Jin Jing, a Chi Kung form brought to the temple by monk Bodhidharma in the early sixth century.

Fox took her place in the middle row. Vick occupied the center of the front row, directly facing the abbot, and began the slow, meditative movements of a tai chi form.

"I thought I'd be very, very nervous, and I wasn't," Fox said. "It was very calming — the whole setting with the trees and the abbey and him up in front, and everything was quiet and you could hear some birds. It was probably the pinnacle of my tai chi experience to do this for the abbot. It was just amazing."

Vick agreed. "To have the honor of performing in front of the abbot in the Shaolin Temple was something I'll never forget," he said.

By American standards, the visitors' performance rated as excellent, Vick said. The abbot applauded.

"He was very generous," Fox said. "He said he appreciated it, and that he knew we had our heart in it ... and he knew we had practiced hard."

Then, the visitors from America stood back and watched the temple's world-renowned warrior monks leap, kick and spin through an eye-popping routine of kung fu techniques.

A remarkable day in Chinese culture was only beginning for Fox, Vick and 66 companions in their tour group from the American Center for Chinese Studies.

The group included six students from The Changing Dragon tai chi school in Auburn, which Fox and Vick lead as co-instructors.

As the Americans toured the temple grounds, Vick, Fox and Minick made a steep climb of 2.4 miles to the cave where Bodhidharma, founder of Zen Buddhism and kung fu, meditated for nine years in the sixth century.

"This, for me was going to the grass roots — the origin of what we do today in martial arts," Vick said. "Being able to go to China, to the Shaolin Temple, and see and feel and sense the beginning of what I'm studying and what I'm teaching is just an experience at the highest level."

The tourists then savored a "head of state" dinner, identical to a meal served to Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2006, when he became the first foreign leader to visit the temple.

"They treated us like royalty. They just kept bringing the food and bringing the food. It was incredible," said Mary Schmitz of Fort Wayne, a student at The Changing Dragon. "We're all, like,

Students at Taguo School in Dengfeng, China, live in stark dorm rooms. Drinking cups lined up precisely along a window contain some of their few personal possessions.



MARY SCHMITZ



JANE MINICK

Students at Taguo School in Dengfeng, China, show great curiosity about their visitors from America.

"They have a focus on health, and tai chi is a part of that."

Greg Vick, Auburn
Speaking of the popularity of tai chi in China

ready to explode, and there's six more courses to come."

No one kept count of the courses, but the visitors guessed at between 20 and 30 — all vegetarian.

"What I thought was meat really wasn't meat — it was tofu. It was delicious," said Jane Minick of Hamilton.

Their next stop took the Americans to the Taguo School of Shaolin Martial Arts in Dengfeng, where 5,000 young people learn martial arts. The students put on a stunning show of balance, strength and flexibility for the visitors.

The price the children pay for their skills astonished the Americans.

"From the time they're 4 years old, they leave their families and everybody they know and go to this kung fu school, and that's where they grow up," Schmitz marveled.

"Some of the kids may see their parents once a year. Some may not see them at all," Fox said.

The academy students train seven days a week, with eight hours of martial arts and four hours of cultural studies per day. They sleep 12 to a room on hard bunk beds, with bare walls and few possessions.

"It looked a little bit like a prison room. It was really stark," Fox said.

"If children in America were living like that, it would probably be considered neglect," said Cathy Vick, Greg Vick's wife.

Yet Chinese parents — who rarely have more than one child — consider it an honor for their boys (and a few girls) to attend the school, where they prepare for careers in police, military and security jobs, or even roles as actors in martial arts movies.

Martial arts pervade the culture of China. When the American visitors rose early each day to rehearse for their performance at the temple, they found plenty of company. From 5 a.m. on, Chinese people were practicing tai chi and other martial arts in city parks and their own yards.

"They have a focus on health, and tai chi is a part of that," Greg Vick said. Tai chi offers health benefits, focus, balance and relaxation, he explained.

"The connection of mind, body and spirit is very important to them," he said. "To me, Chinese people were happy, healthy, kind and friendly."