Group strives to keep shrimping area history alive

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When the last resident of the last Chinese shrimping village in the San Francisco Bay Area died two years ago, activists were afraid a precious and too little known history of Chinese immigrants would fade away.  
Luckily, they have teamed up with philanthropists to try to restore the village's historic structures - a pier and a few wooden shacks - and preserve its legacy.  
Frank Quan, the last shrimper of China Camp Village, died at the age of 91 in 2016. By living in the village his whole life, he kept alive the essential community spirit and historic way of life of his family and community.  
Quan also witnessed the slow demise of the village, which dwindled in size and eventually became a state park with hiking and mountain bike trails.  
In 2011, the non-profit group Friends of China Camp took over the park from the state parks department to avoid closure because of statewide budget cuts.  
Over the last few years, the park has seen an increase in visits. Membership has increased to more than 800 from 25 in 2012, and nearly 3,000 people have signed up for the group's newsletter, according to Ed Lai, treasurer of Friends of China Camp.  
Despite its popularity, the park has still been experiencing a financial strain. Last year, it had a deficit of $200,000, said Lai.  
"We have to raise funds ourselves to maintain Quan's house and repair the pier," he said.  
The projects of maintaining the house and repairing the pier's eroded pilings are estimated at $100,000 each.  
Preservation efforts have recently been joined by Heidi Kuhn, daughter of a childhood friend of Quan, and CEO of the non-profit organization Roots of Peace.  
She has recently met with Chinese philanthropists in Shanghai for China Camp Preservation Project.  
Kuhn's great-great-grandfather John A. McNear offered to let Chinese immigrants live on his property during the difficult times of discrimination in the 1860s. They set up temporary camps on the McNear property, which later became the China Camp Village.  
The village had almost 500 residents at its peak in the 1880s. More than 3 million pounds of shrimp were harvested from the bay each year, most of it dried for export to China.  
She said it's "very timely and important" to tell the story of China Camp, which shows "respect and friendship across borders".  
"Our goal is to raise $1 million to restore this beautiful China Camp as a symbol of respect for those who suffered ethnic discrimination," said Kuhn.  
"It's achievable," said Frank Yih, 84, a Shanghai-based entrepreneur and philanthropist who founded the Shanghai GuoFeng Charity Foundation.  
Yih and Kuhn met at a Rotary Club event in the Bay Area earlier this year and he was immediately touched by the story of China Camp.  
"Chinese tourists focus too much on Hollywood and other popular attractions, and tend to neglect the history of Chinese immigrants," said Yih, who grew up in the Bay Area.  
"I hope they can visit the park, taking a walk on the beautiful beach and learning about the people-to-people stories of 150 years ago."

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