

OPINION

Opinion: Chinese Americans combat coronavirus

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There is nothing more American than fellow citizens volunteering to help out their neighbors in a time of need. Â

Chinese Americans in Michigan are stepping up in big and small ways to try to help their neighbors, friends and fellow citizens during this coronavirus pandemic. The Michigan Chinese American Coalition was formed in late January 2020 to assist in combating the deadly coronavirus.

A loose group of Chinese Americans in the Metro Detroit area initially came together to help the people of China who were suffering because of the coronavirus that incubated in Wuhan, spread across China and has now reach all continents.

They sent funds and equipment to more than 17 hospitals in China and quickly pivoted to helping America mid-February when it was apparent COVID-19 was spreading in Michigan. They stocked up on medical coveralls and masks for local Michigan hospitals.

Over the last two weeks, they have donated supplies to 18 federal and local hospitals. They understand the virus knows no political boundaries.Â It will sicken and possibly kill regardless of your race, color of your skin, immigration status or political identification.

Discovering this group, I asked, â€œWho is the leader, who is in charge?â€Â In very Chinese style, they each deferred and collectively said, â€œWe are all workers, using our knowledge, skills, talents, time and money to be helpful as we can to this combat this invisible war without bombs that harms us all.â€

The group comes from the Chinese mainland or Peopleâ€™s Republic of China and Taiwan, they are conservative and liberal, Republicans and Democrats with aÂ common bond:Â a love for their adopted country and a desire to do their part to help their fellow man.Â

As of this writing they hadÂ raised nearly \$200,000. The group is pleased by not only the fundraising success and getting help to hospitals and people in need, but also that the Chinese American community has coalesced around a common goalÂ in this time of need.Â



Zackery Zhang, MD, delivers medical supplies to the office of philanthropy at Mercy Health. (Photo: Tom)

“Helping our fellow Americans in this time of need has helped galvanized our diverse Chinese community here in Michigan,” says Joe Miao, one of the group’s initial organizers.

“Many of us were educated in Michigan, own businesses here and have raised our families here,” says Grace Cai, a member of the group. “This is our home, and we simply want to do our small part to contribute in this time of need.”

The group has donated various personal protective equipment including masks, full body coveralls, gloves and eye protection goggles to the Michigan hospitals.

They are hopeful their efforts will alleviate some of the infection risk health care workers in Michigan face.

“United we stand, and with solidarity we will win this fight together,” says Charlee Liu, who works a day job as an engineer with General Motors.

Yet some of these selfless volunteers have been shunned or disrespected in the past weeks.

At a time when China’s rise as a global economic and military power has unsettled many in the West, the coronavirus and the way some politicians have used it for their gain has fed a latent bigotry against the people of Asian descent. We should stand against such bigotry.

The members of the Michigan Chinese American Coalition are as American as apple pie. They are quietly giving back to people in need. Their action shows a sense of humanity that makes us all proud.

The group shows through its words and deeds that we must join forces to fight and defeat this dreadful virus. They are demonstrating that together we are truly better.

Tom Watkins is a former Michigan state superintendent of schools who has spent nearly four decades working to build cultural, educational and economic ties between the U.S. and China.

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