

Statue embodies Mongolian culture

The unveiling of the sculpture at Ulaanbaatar Park is a moment of pride for immigrants living in Denver.

By Anthony Bowe *The Denver Post*

The heart of the Denver Mongolian community throbbed with traditional fervor Sunday as an emblematic sculpture was unveiled in Lowry.

Dancing, singing and a contortionist's show served as precursor to the ribbon-cutting and blessing of a 20-foot stainless steel tulga statue at Ulaanbaatar Park. The Mongolian tulga is a four-pronged fireplace positioned in the center of a nomadic household called a gher, or yurt.

The celebration continues a five-year relationship between Denver and the Mongolian city of Ulaanbaatar. The two became sister cities in 2004.

Artist Tsogtsaikhan "Tsogo" Mijid said the tulga in Mongolian culture represents family, goodwill and peace toward neighbors and that the sculpture has a double meaning.

"Denver is like a tulga in the center of the United States for the Mongolian people. It gives peace for people here and the next generation of Mongolian people who come here," he said.

The statue is the first sculpture of its kind in the U.S., Mijid said. It was erected as a gift to the city and paid for by donors.

Denver is a hub for Mongolians. The first generation arrived in 1989, said Davaasuren Damdinsuren, minister counselor and deputy chief of mission for the Mongolian Embassy in Washington, D.C., who was in Denver on Sunday for the ceremony. About 2,000 Mongolians now live in Denver.

"We have such a short time period to adjust to America. We want to involve ourselves in the culture and assimilate, but keep our uniqueness," said Duren Walters, who works for Denver Public Schools and helped start the Mongolian School of Colorado in 2006, which houses 40 students.

Mijid said Denver is an ideal community for Mongolian implants because it closely resembles the mountainous landscape and four-season climate of their homeland.

Mongolian culture is also brushing off on Colorado residents. Neil Lott, 32, began playing horse-head fiddle four years ago after he heard the beauty of maagtal praise songs, which are mostly about nature.



"It's the eloquence of their language and music that attracted me," he said.

Many of the hundreds who attended the event Sunday called Mijid's sculpture emotional and meaningful, as well.

"I feel very proud of it," said Bilguun Batsaihan, 17, who came to the United States when he was 10 years old and recently graduated from Overland High School. "To come to a part of America that has our culture and this statue is special."

Anthony Bowe 303-954-1661
or abowe@denverpost.com

Julia Bayar, 5, tries to touch the balloons tied to the tulga sculpture Sunday at Ulaanbaatar Park. The 20-foot statue symbolizes family and peace toward neighbors.