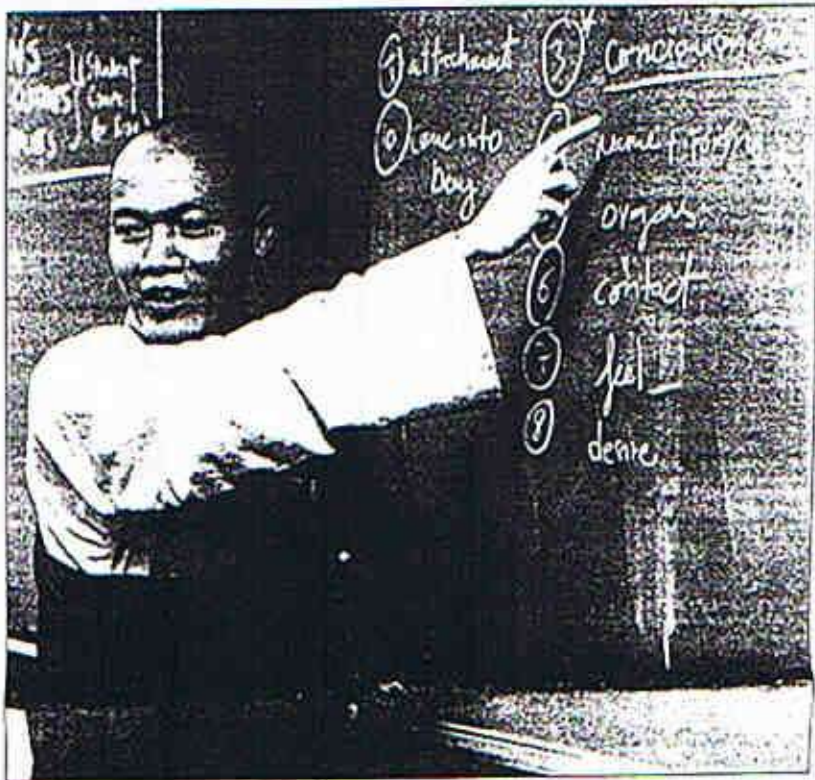


Good Karma for Forest Park students



Rev. Thich Haeng Dat, a Buddhist monk who founded the 10,000 Buddha Summit Monastery in Corydon, visited the Forest Park English II-Humanities class on Tuesday to explain the values and philosophies of his faith. Students discovered there were more similarities than differences between Christianity and Buddhism.

Photo by
M. J. ...

by Kathy Trevitt

According to the 2000 Census, Dubois County's population is 39,474. Of those, 28,638 — or 72.5 percent — are white, 55 are black, 29 are Asian (not including from Vietnam) and 1,107 are Hispanic. While the census doesn't include statistical information about religion, in all likelihood most of the population — white, black and Hispanic at any rate — are Christian.

In other words, cultural diversity is somewhat lacking.

That his students should have no exposure to other cultures has long bothered Forest Park English teacher Bob Emmert. During his first semester at the University of Tennessee 20-plus years ago, Emmert was assaulted by fellow students who questioned his devotion to his faith. "Why are you Catholic?" It was a tough question to answer, because Emmert had not had exposure to other religions and had no idea what they were based on. Emmert's experience was repeated this year by a 2004 Fir-

est student who reported that he did not know how to respond.

Luckily, thanks to Emmert and Forest Park Principal Jeff Jesse, the Class of 2006 will be better prepared for the world beyond Dubois County, courtesy of a new English II-Humanities pilot course Emmert is teaching this year.

While still fulfilling Indiana's Academic Standards for a junior English course, this class goes far beyond "typical" or "standard."

Topics to be covered during the year include Greek/Roman Mythology and Culture, Art and Architecture, Appreciation, Movie Appreciation, Ancient/Modern/Postmodern Studies, Film, Local German Heritage/Roots and Culture of Dubois County Culture, Culinary Arts, Peace, Justice and Gender Issues, Environmental Awareness/Appreciation, Psychology, Vietnam Exploration/History, Current Events and, the area currently being explored, Buddhism, Spirituality and World Religion.

And in prison, seven short stories set as they drink and listened intently to Rev. Thich Haeng Dat, a Buddhist monk who, three years ago, founded 10,000 Buddha Summit Monastery in Corydon. A slightly built man with a \$200 wall smile, Rev. Thich Haeng Dat was dressed in the traditional garb of his order. Soft-spoken and amazingly articulate, he explained the Buddhist philosophy, basically that all living things deserve respect (resulting in Good Karma) and killing animals is just one step removed from killing people. Also, to treat others as you would want to be treated and be responsible for your actions because you are in charge of your destiny.

Rev. Thich Haeng Dat closed the students to call him "Wat" as a moniker to pronunciation problems. Born in Vietnam, Wat's religious conviction was not the result of his upbringing. In fact, only once during his 11 years in Vietnam did he visit a Buddhist Temple. His mother took him there, along with a statue of Buddha to be blessed.

Wat moved to the United States, first to Los Angeles, which was not a place to find solitude, and then to Texas. By a circuitous path, he ended up in Louisville, then discovered the property at Corydon where his monastery is located. Wat believes he may have had some intuition to that place in a previous life.

After his Master died, he traveled, first to Los Angeles, which was not a place to find solitude, and then to Texas. By a circuitous path, he ended up in Louisville, then discovered the property at Corydon where his monastery is located. Wat believes he may have had some intuition to that place in a previous life.

The students — a mix of freshly scrubbed white faces topped with clean, shining hair in various shades — listened intently. Jaci Hansen, who had obviously done some reading about Buddhism, asked in-depth questions about the different forms of Buddhism. Wat explained the nuances of traditional and non-traditional practices.

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Of the students, 13 were Catholic and the other six were Protestant.

Abby Fleck, who knew little of Buddhism before the class commenced, "expected it to be a lot different." Instead, probably except for the vegetarianism, she kept finding parallels to her own faith.

"Before this class," added Hansen, "most kids didn't have any idea of what it is out there."

This morning, the same students who learned about Buddhism on Tuesday would hear from a Catholic monk. They will also be visited by a Protestant minister, someone of the Jewish faith and, if it can be arranged, a believer in Islam. The class was already visited by a Muslim imam.

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"I am so excited for you," Emmert told his class on Tuesday. "I'm excited for you to have this exposure to a different faith and how rare that is. I hope it ignites a fire in you to learn more about your own faith."

In addition to classroom activities and guest speakers, Emmert plans to take his students on several field trips, to

places like a civil rights museum, an ethnic restaurant and Hemlock Cliffs for a hike.

In a letter to parents prior to the start of the school year, Emmert explained, "A goal of the course is to encourage students to become creative, conscientious citizens, while refining their use of leisure time for personal and community enrichment."

His students seem to be well on their way!

But meanwhile, Walt a/k/a Reverend Thich Hang Dat, wishes to extend an invitation to any who would desire visiting his monastery at 3600 Mathis Road in Corydon. Every Sunday, from 10 to 11 a.m., people of all faiths gather there to meditate and discuss religion.

The Vietnamese New Year will be celebrated on Sunday, February 13, at 2 p.m. and again, anyone who would like to is welcome to join in the celebration.

Buddha's birthday, traditionally a month long event, will be celebrated at 10,000 Buddhas Summit Monastery over Memorial Day Weekend. Parents Day, another traditional holi-

day, will be enjoyed over Labor Day Weekend. Both events draw many from outside the Buddhist faith.

Reverend Thich Hang Dat explains that his mother is living with him now at the monastery. He says she moved to the United States after he completed his degree and was at first disappointed that her son

chose a spiritual path as opposed to a career as an electrical engineer. But she is now content to study the faith that so attracted her son.

"She cooks for me," he says with a laugh. "I like that."

Some things — like Mom's home cooking and the belief that treating others as you would like to be treated, truly are universal.