

# Profile

## JOHN WEI

If something is happening  
in Cary's Chinese American  
community, chances are John  
Wei will be on hand.

By JAY PRICE  
STAFF WRITER



**J**ohn Wei worked as a volunteer for arch-conservative Republican Sen. Jesse Helms' 1990 re-election campaign.

He also helps out with campaigns for Democrats like Gov. Jim Hunt and Rep. David Price, who calls him friend.

He also sees nothing unusual about such a widely-split ticket of support.

"I'm not a party person," he said. "I'm a people person."

Which may be the only way to describe Wei.

There are official titles, starting with his job as senior computer programmer at Carolina Power and Light Co. But his real function in life is bringing people together in

ways that benefit all involved. He is an unofficial spokesman, organizer and cheerleader for the Chinese-American business community, and also a kind of ambassador between the Triangle's Chinese-Americans and the rest of the populace. And, say his friends, he helps just about anyone - Chinese, American, whatever - who asks.

Among the volunteer efforts he takes on are arranging grand openings of businesses and parties celebrating the accomplishments of members of the Chinese-American community. He also organizes several of that community's major yearly events, such as the Chinese New Year celebration held at Athens Drive High School.

If a new Chinese restaurant opens in the area, Wei is usually asked to arrange the grand opening and lines up politicians and

the press, inviting the key people who will help the new business get off on the right foot.

He also has been instrumental in Cary's forging a sister-city relationship with Hsinchu City in Taiwan, which, like Cary, is adjacent to a large business park. He was much of the reason CP&L decided to sign on as a sponsor of the Sister City program.

Ask his friends what Wei is like, and the testimonials are nearly identical.

"Whenever people need, he's always there," said Dr. C.C. Yang who, like Wei, was one of the founding members of the state Chinese American Business Association.

"It seems like there's hardly a good cause

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**WEI**

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there in Cary that John is not involved in," said Congressman Price. "This is a labor of love for John."

"He likes people," said Dr. Ken Lee, another founder of the business association, a founder of the Taiwanese American Association, and former owner of Lee Tailor Shop. "He likes people. He's very enthusiastic about people and helping people."

**TO START WITH**

John Wei's life has not been easy, though this doesn't show on his face, which makes him appear a boyish 15 years younger than his age, which is 47.

Taiwan suffered greatly during the postwar years when Wei was growing up. Food was scarce, but aid from the U.S., and later Japan, helped the country get back on its feet.

Wei graduated in 1971 from Normal University in Taiwan with an undergraduate degree in teaching. He had wanted to be a scientist since childhood, but a single catastrophic event changed that, and his life.

One day, the 20-year-old Wei was working in the university lab, working toward his dream. The chemicals in front of him suddenly exploded.

Wei, who is almost ceaselessly upbeat, turns somber when the subject of the accident comes up. He removes his eyeglasses and seems on the verge of tears.

says. "Only one eye is good. I almost lost my hand, I lost many fingers. Both ear drums ruptured. But I still survived, and I have a good wife and good children. So, at that time, I decide to spend my life helping people."

This is all he'll say about the accident, other than "It was a long time ago."

The injuries to his hands made lab work difficult, so he decided the best thing to do would be to change his focus to mathematics, which he taught in high school after graduating.

Wei and his future wife, Shue, met when both were teaching. Neither was afraid of hard work. At one point, they simultaneously held eight jobs between them - four each.

Wei said this also might help explain his fondness for taking on so many after-work volunteer tasks.

Both Weis came to Penn State in 1978, where they earned identical master's degrees in math and computer science (she is now an advisory programmer with IBM).

The Weis moved to Cary in 1982 after he got a job with CP&L. Then came a two-year stint with IBM China in Hong Kong and Beijing, but the Weis came back in 1986 and he returned to CP&L in 1986.

**A NEW HOMETOWN**

The area's Chinese-American community is a high-powered group, and includes dozens of Ph.D.s, professors, university

**John Wei**

**TITLE:** senior programmer, CP&L

**FAMILY:** Wife, Shue; daughter, Shiny, 18; son, Addi, 12

**EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:** founder and president, state Chinese American Business Association; past president, Triangle Area Chinese American Association; past principal, Raleigh Chinese Language School; member, Cary board of directors for First Citizen's Bank; treasurer, Cary Sister Cities Association; member, Cary Sister Cities Commission; helped raise money for China flood relief in 1991.

**READS:** books on investment and real estate; The Wall Street Journal; Investor's Business Daily; Business Week; newspaper business sections

**FAVORITE TV AND MOVIES:** only watches TV news, otherwise it's "read, read, read."

**HOBBIES:** table tennis and flower and vegetable gardening

tives in the Triangle's major employers. A recent illustration of just how impressive this group is came this winter when President Bill Clinton appointed Dr. Wushow Chou of N.C. State University to serve in the Treasury Department as deputy assistant secretary for information systems.

But Dr. George Yuan, a senior programmer and rising star at IBM, said Chinese-Americans sometimes shy away from contact with the rest of the community. Language and culture differences can make such interaction difficult, so it's much easier to turn to each other.

But Wei knows the good things that getting involved with others can mean, and tries to increase the interchange between the groups, said Yuan.

he set up the going-away party for Dr. Chou. The program included remarks from Price, Cary Mayor Koka Booth and Town Council members. They and several other non-Chinese in attendance were there specifically because Wei had invited them.

Wei also calls Chinese-Americans to remind them to register, and to vote, said Yuan.

Booth described Wei as "very political," but not in the classic sense. He's involved in politics, but not the partisan aspects, said Booth, who described Wei as a business friend.

For his part, Wei said he was eager to do more for the town, which he and his wife say is one of the best places in the world. "I told Koka Booth this," said Wei. "I just do whatever I can do. Just ask me