

Finding a way to help later in life

Retired anesthesiologist Tae Byung Whang of Penfield was one of three Asian-Americans 65 or older honored by the Memorial Art Gallery.

By **AMY CAVALIER**

Messenger Post Staff

When Dr. Tae Byung Whang came to America in 1955, he could read English, but he couldn't speak the language very well. That didn't stop him from becoming an anesthesiologist, spending 23 years at Rochester General Hospital and 10 at Park Ridge.

Now 77 and retired, he is fluent in three languages. Whang learned Japanese as a child in school, Korean from his family and he knew how to read English before coming to America at the age of 25, but could not speak. He uses that knowledge as a volunteer with Literacy Volunteers of America since 1999, helping those new to the United States communicate better.

"Part of the reason for teaching English to newcomers is because I remember the hardships I went through because of my lack of English skills ...," he said. "You can imagine at college, when you go to class and listen to the lecture ... my comprehension was not complete so I was falling behind, so I had to work twice as much as the other students to catch up with them."

Recently, Whang was honored for volunteering with one of the Memorial Art Gallery's 2007 Arts and Education Awards. Masako Ono Toribara of Gates and Brijen K. Gupta of Brighton were honored along with Whang at the Art Gallery's May 6 Asian Pacific American Heritage Family Day.

Byong Baek, a member of the Greater Rochester Korean American Association, nominated Whang, who is a past board



SUBMITTED PHOTO/GARY GRAHAM

Dr. Tae Byung Whang is escorted by Byong Baek to receive a 2007 Arts and Education award at the Memorial Art Gallery's Asian Pacific American Heritage Family Day on May 6. Baek nominated Whang for the award, which is aimed at honoring Asian-Americans 65 or older.

member of the group.

"I think he's very humble and a very dedicated human being to work at his own profession and also as a volunteer...," she said.

She said Whang's wife, Josephine, is also very involved in volunteerism. The couple give their time to the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and he serves as an elder at the Third Presbyterian Church on East Avenue, where he runs the food cupboard.

For a number of years, until the Rochester Korean Presbyterian Church was able to purchase its own building, he arranged for area Koreans to hold their worship service in the Third Presbyterian Church's chapel.

Whang's father was a Presbyterian minister. "He gave his life for that in North Korea," he said. "He was killed when the Korean War broke out."

Whang fled to South Korea, with intentions of returning to reunite with his mother in a week.

"I left and that was it," he said. "After that there was no communication at all. I don't

know what kind of life she had after I left. It must not have been very easy as the wife of a minister. I don't know when she died."

Those who fled North Korea hoped to return when communist forces did a tactical retreat, but the soldiers never left. Whang said his family was one of many who were separated during the invasion.

Whang came to America from South Korea for an education. He earned his degrees from West Virginia Wesleyan College and Cincinnati Medical School and then came to Rochester General for his internship and residency at Strong.

Anesthesiology at the time, he said, was "in its infancy." He said the field intrigued him, because it is "putting people between life and death." He retired after 30 years and said he now seeks fulfillment in volunteering.

"It's a sort of gratification you feel by helping people and seeing them improve their language," he said, "because as they improve their language, their career sort of develops for them, which is gratifying."