UTSA’s East Asia Institute hosted the 6th annual Kimchi Festival on Saturday, April 28, 2018 at the Student Union Retama auditorium and Galleria at UTSA’s main campus. Celebrating Korea and its culture, this event was held in collaboration with the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston, San Antonio Korean American Association (SAKAA), Korean American Cultural Center of San Antonio (KACCSA), San Antonio Joong Ang Dance Group, KACCSA Youth Dance Team, HanMaEum Worship Dance Team and UTSA’s Korean Culture Club.

There were more than 200 people in attendance for this much anticipated event on a beautiful Saturday morning.

The festivities for the event started at 10:00 AM, during which guests were invited to visit cultural and educational booths which involved games, art & craft activities, and short presentations. Many participants were attracted to the craft booths where they enjoyed activities such as coloring their own custom Korean mask with customized colors or recreating the Korean flag using stickers while learning the meaning of the yin-yang and line symbols within the flag.

Other attendees participated in Korean paper folding to make hanbok (Korean traditional clothes). There was also a hanbok wearing booth, where guests were able to try on the colorful traditional Korean clothing and take pictures.

Other popular attractions included yut (four-stick game), a Korean trivia game, and informational booths on the Korean language classes offered in San Antonio and English teaching opportunities in Korea.

The programs started with the MCs Aditi Chpagai and Julio Lujan, both UTSA Korean language students, talking about the event and performances that the audience should expect to see.

The KACCSA Youth Dance Team opened with the Korean Fan Dance, a traditional dance generally performed at the beginning of festival celebrations. The dance was well coordinated and the outfits vibrant.

After the performance, Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of the East Asia Institute took the stage and gave welcoming remarks and many thanks to all the organizations that helped volunteer at the festival.
After that, San Antonio Joong Ang Dance Group performed JangGo NoRi, a traditional Korean instrument performance which requires precise playing techniques in order to make pleasant sounds.

A special guest from the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston, Consul General Hyung Gil Kim, attended the event speaking about his amazement in the increasing interest American people have for Korea and its culture. He started by mentioning how one of Korea’s staple dishes, known as Kimchi, was in the past considered a dish that many outside of Korea shied away from due to its smell and taste. However, it has grown to be very popular around the world.

“Korea is nowadays considered a hot topic due to many events. Some include the recently hosted Pyeong Chang Winter Olympics, the U.S.-North Korea summit meetings, and the historic meeting between the leaders of North Korea and South Korea in which a peace treaty was just recently signed”, said Kim. Going off his last point of relations, Kim introduced the bilateral relations with the U.S., by focusing on three main pillars that support it.

The first pillar is the “rock-solid” Korea-U.S. alliance. “U.S. was the first country to send troops to South Korea during it’s fight for freedom and liberty during the Korean War”, said Kim. “Even during the continuous threats by North Korea, South Korea and the U.S. successfully maintained a strong military cooperation and finally brought North Korea to the dialogue table.”

According to Kim, the second pillar of the Korea-U.S. relations is the economic cooperation between the countries. He explained the free trade agreement and surplus gained from the trading of goods and services, mentioning that Korea and the U.S. have a $22 billion and $12.2 billion surplus respectively.

Kim mentioned, “The third pillar is the people-to-people exchange.” He stated that “in addition to strong political and economic ties, friendship between the countries has come about through the strong ties between the people.” A good example of this being the strong Korean community of 120,000 Koreans in
Texas alone, and the more than 200,000 Americans living in Korea.

Consul General Kim ended by stating, “I wish that you all enjoy a taste of Korean food, music and arts today and take this experience to connect more with Korea.”

After the speech, K-pop dances were performed by UTSA Korean Culture Club who danced to a mashup of popular Korean pop music.

Alexis Armstrong and Joshua Smith, the MCs for the second half of the event, introduced the audience to the remaining events and started the second half off by introducing the next program which was the speeches given by the 2018 Korean Speech contest winners. The winners of the beginner and inter-mediate levels were invited to recite their speeches to the audience and were able to showcase their Korean language proficiency. They both earned warm rounds of applause from the audience for their dedication and perseverance to mastering a difficult, but beautiful language.

The UTSA Korean Culture Club also made a presentation about the LiNK program, an organization that rescues North Korean refugees, and invited the audience to join them for this very admirable cause.

Following the LiNK presentation, the HanMaEum Worship Dance Team performed the Hansam dance. It is a folk dance unique to Korea and is performed in long sleeves, involving moving in dynamic and wide movements, which represents the act of chasing evil spirits away.

Then the KASCA Youth team came back to the stage and performed the last dance of the day “Nanta.” It is a drum performance involving intricate rhythm and movement that increases in speed and complexity as the performance progresses. Some believe that performing of Nanta to being helpful in cleansing oneself of ill feelings and troubles.

After the program ended, Consul Ggochnim Bak was invited to the podium to speak about an upcoming event in Houston known as the “2018 Changwon K-Pop World Festival. The event will be holding preliminaries in July, so Bak encouraged the audience to participate if they have any interest.

Once the performances and presentations were concluded, certificates of appreciation were presented to the performers. Dr. Deuk-hee Gong, professor of Korean language at UTSA and the University of the Incarnate Words, gave closing remarks and invited the audience to return again next year to celebrate Korea in San Antonio.

Afterwards, audience members were invited to do Korean food tasting in the Retama Galleria. The food was graciously presented by the San Antonio Korean American Association with the funding from the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston. 10 different items of Kimchi and Korea dishes were available and were greatly enjoyed by the attendees.

The UTSA’s East Asia Institute helps promote awareness and understanding of Asian countries, including China, Japan, and Korea. We look forward to hosting the 7th annul Kimchi Festival next year, see you there!