

Teacher challenges Piqua students to learn Mandarin



Sharon Semanle
For the Daily Call

PIQUA — While Spanish, German and French have remained the premier foreign languages taught in classrooms for decades, Mandarin Chinese is emerging as a favorite subject as evidenced by students attending both junior and senior high schools in Piqua.

Twenty-nine-year old Ling

Hughes, a native of Chang Sha in the Hunan Province of China, is one busy teacher commuting between the two schools both mornings and afternoons. Greeting each student with a cheery hello or “Ni hau” as they enter the classroom, Hughes is making strides as her younger charges quickly pick up Mandarin after only several weeks.

Chinese paper lanterns, colorful posters of the Great Wall and city

of Shanghai and graphic posters illustrating Chinese holidays, family members and sports decorate the PHS classroom. The 30 language students — mainly freshmen, seniors and a sophomore — immerse themselves in the first-year “Happy Chinese” textbook and learn through a combination of flashcards, videos and written/oral quizzes.

Team competition is also a teaching component with stu-

dents paired up to solve video vocabulary games.

“They are learning a little bit every day,” observed Hughes “mainly through practice and repetition. I tell them ‘If you don’t use it, you will forget it.’” Through pin yin (pronunciation) and learning Chinese symbols rather than alphabetical letters, the inquisitive Piqua teens are grasping a

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Mandarin teacher Ling Hughes works with students Thursday. Hughes, a native of the Hunan Province, is teaching her native language to junior high and senior high school students in Piqua.

who was a company translator at the time as well as her parents whom initially we not too receptive toward the relationship. Scott’s persistence and “nice” personality, smiles Ling, eventually won him over. “He was very brave coming to China not knowing the language or any of the people.” For the next two years he taught English and business at a Chinese college where all the students were English majors.

On Nov. 1, 2011 Ling and Scott were married in a traditional Chinese wedding in her parents’ backyard.

The ceremony suffered a near setback, however, when the couple arrived “late” after hiring a bus to transport them and their friends from Chang Sha nearly 60 miles away.

The Hughes arrived back in the United States in August 2012 and, one month later, Ling acquired a teaching job at PJHS.

Both Ling and Scott, a financial adviser in Springfield, both reside in Piqua and are

“parents” to a Chinese foreign exchange student, Sely Zhong, a senior at Lehman Catholic High School.

When queried about life in the U.S, Ling replied “It’s mostly what I thought it would be. The people here are very nice” but admits there are certain cultural differences which she has not grasped.

Among her favorite pastimes are badminton, which she interjects is “very Chinese” along with reading non-fiction and real life stories. She enjoys cooking and especially likes baking with the use of an oven, a luxury not afforded her in China.

Fluent in both Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, Ling says she occasionally suffers some homesickness although he returned home to see her family in June for one month.

Like many of her students nowadays, however, she’s ready to tackle her next hurdle — passing her driver’s license on Sept. 14.