

Marking China's Wenchuan Earthquake



Rescuers search for victims in the debris of a hospital after the earthquake in the southwestern province of Sichuan, China, on May 12, 2008.

Welcome to As It Is, the daily magazine from VOA Learning English.

I'm Mario Ritter. Today, we look back five years to a disastrous earthquake in southwest China.

"The wall behind us ripped open, and we all started at it, terrified. But before I could react, the ground split open..."

Today, we also hear about human rights conditions in China, including news about the family of rights activist Chen Guangcheng. And at the end of our show, we tell about an American high school that gives students real-life experience.

Monday marked the fifth anniversary of the Wenchuan earthquake in China. The earthquake killed tens of thousands of people. Hundreds of thousands of buildings were seriously damaged or destroyed.

VOA correspondent Bill Ide spoke to survivors who are still struggling with the effects of the earthquake. Faith Lapidus has his report.

The Wenchuan earthquake became one of the most destructive disasters in recent memory when it struck Sichuan province in southern China. The quake was centered in Wenchuan County. Scientists say it had a magnitude, or strength, of eight-point-zero.

Nearly 90,000 people were killed in the quake. Many government-built structures collapsed. Collapsed schools killed more than 6,500 students and teachers. There was, and still is, public anger at officials for the building failures and loss of life that resulted.

Wei Ling was in chemistry class when the Wenchuan earthquake struck. "At first, I thought my teacher was calling me. And then the entire room began to shake. Even the television was shaking. The wall behind us ripped open, and we all started at it, terrified. But before I could react, the ground split open, and I fell down and couldn't feel anything."

People in the affected areas have been attempting to rebuild. Many have taken out bank loans to add to the reconstruction money provided by the government to ensure that their homes are safe.

But experts say more needs to be done. Long Enshen is with Sichuan University's Institute of Disaster Management and Reconstruction. "I think that awareness of anti-seismic construction and disaster prevention is now what is most lacking. And I believe that we need to strengthen every day action by the government and by non-government organizations to help with these matters."

I'm Faith Lapidus.

China Rights Update

Earlier this year, we told you about the Chinese rights activist Chen Guangcheng. He received the Lantos Human Rights Prize in January. Chen Guangcheng made news around the world last year after he escaped house arrest and fled to the United States Embassy in Beijing. He gained attention for his work as a human rights lawyer. Mr. Chen -- who is blind -- now lives with his family in the United States.

Now, his brother Chen Guangfu says he was beaten by people acting for the government. It is the most recent case of suspected revenge against the rights activist's family.

Chen Guangfu says two unidentified men jumped out of a car and beat him

several minutes as he returned home in the eastern province of Shandong recently. The 56-year-old says he was not seriously injured in the attack.

Also, there appear to be new signs that China is intensifying its campaign against people calling for more openness by the government.

Liu Ping led a campaign pushing for government officials to publicly state their financial holdings. His lawyer says the activist was detained last month on suspicion of "inciting subversion."

No public statement has been made on the subversion charges. But it is an accusation often made against government critics.

Also, police in Beijing have reportedly detained 10 other anti-corruption activists. A lawyer for some of those detained told the French news agency that police charged the activists with "unlawful assembly." The people arrested showed a large sign calling for greater openness by the government.

This School Offers Real-life Experience

High school students have different needs. Some plan to study medicine, law or engineering. They go to college to get a degree. But some students want to study things like cooking, building, repairing cars, or other specialized skills. Young people may have different goals in life.

VOA visited a high school in Maryland, near Washington DC, that enables student to get real-life experience. Christopher Cruise has the story.

Thomas Edison High School of Technology offers specialized classes that help get students started on a career. It is a place where students gain experience so they can decide whether to continue in a career or not.

Matthew Wimmer likes to cook. He has two great cooks in his family: his mother and grandmother. The experience of members of his family has influenced him.

"It's sort of inspired me to become a better cook or a better chef overall."

At school, he experiences what it is like to work in a professional kitchen. "New ideas and new different ways to do things."

Today, students in the Restaurant Management Program at this high school are preparing salads.

Teresa Smith is a chef and teacher in the Restaurant Management Program.

day when students are preparing salads, she encourages them to experiment with different ingredients. She also wants her students to have good basic skills in the kitchen.

“We try to do as much as we can from scratch. I also want them to have good basic skills including kitchen math, converting recipes from smaller quantities to larger quantities. I want them to have good knife skills. We also stress safety and sanitation.”

Students take buses from other high schools in the area to attend the programs at Thomas Edison High School. Karen Wilson is the school's spokesperson.

“We have 18 different programs.”

One gives students the skills they need to pass the Certified Nursing Assistant exam. The Auto Body Program teaches students to repair cars. And in cosmetology, Karen Wilson says students learn about hair and skin care but also much more.

“The students learn about chemistry, anatomy and physiology, and work with real-life clients.”

One student who finished preparing a salad in the school's kitchen talked about the processes that take place in the class. He says student taste each other's dishes and provide feedback.

“You can learn different things about what you should have done differently.”

At Thomas Edison High School of Technology, the idea is to provide students with the experience they need to reach their goals.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Thank you for listening today. Join us at the top of the hour, Universal Time, for the latest news.