

Metro

Monday, February 19, 1990

Dialogues to focus on race relations

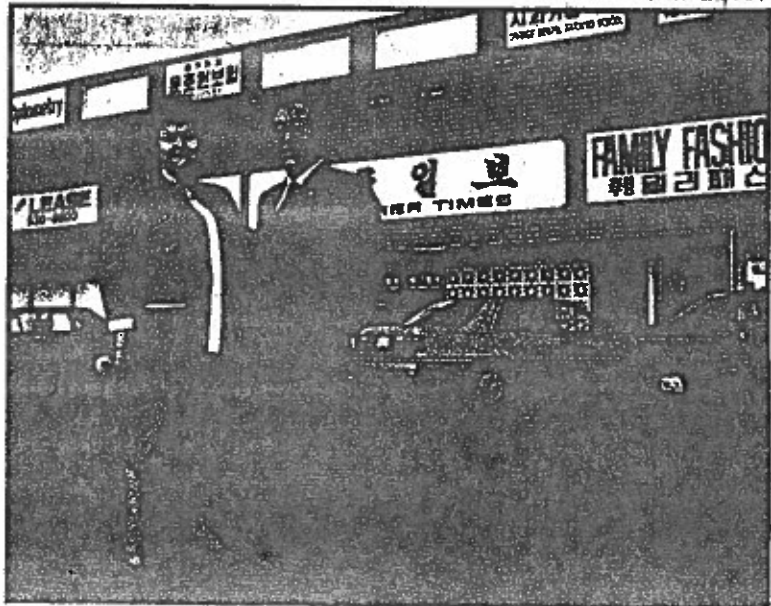
By Thanhha Lai
The Register

GARDEN GROVE — When Korean businessmen debated the city last year over the need for bilingual signs for their shops, Bok Kim wondered whether he ever would understand his Caucasian neighbors.

Next month he'll have a chance to find out.

Kim is hosting the first Living-Room Dialogue talk March 14 between Korean merchants and Caucasian residents. Sponsored by the Orange County Human Relations Commission, 14 participants will take turns inviting each other to their homes for informal chats.

"Everything is much better now," said Kim, owner of the K.D. Night Club on Garden Grove Boulevard, who is opening his Garden Grove home for the first meeting.



Paul Kuroda/The Register

Connie Margolin and Ho Young Chung will be among the participants in scheduled dialogues in Garden Grove.

The tension eased in December when the city Planning Commission asked the Planning Department to rewrite the sign proposal to recommend that bilingual signs be voluntary. The commission had voted in August to require English on commercial signs written in foreign characters, but the City Council sent back the proposal in October after protests from Korean merchants.

The Planning Commission in January changed course and recommended bilingual signs as a voluntary measure.

That revised proposal will be considered Tuesday by the City Council.

"I feel a great sense of victory," said Ho Young Chung, a member of the Human Relations Commission and board member of the Korean-American Association.

Please see DIALOGUES/5

DIALOGUES: Garden Grove talks scheduled

FROM 1

tion of Orange County. "I felt so frustrated before because I felt there were hidden reasons behind the bilingual requirement."

Jerry Margolin, chairman of the Garden Grove Planning Commission, said he initially supported the mandatory bilingual sign requirement in hopes of appeasing some residents who complained of the growing presence of Korean businesses in Garden Grove since the early 1980s. About 200 Korean businesses line a two-mile stretch of Garden Grove Boulevard between Beach Boulevard and Brookhurst Street.

Margolin agreed with the original Planning Department suggestion that English on signs would render easier identification in emergencies.

The Korean community, however, called the proposal discriminatory and elicited help from the American Civil Liberties Union, the Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California and the Orange County Minority Business Council.

They argued that the requirement was unnecessary because only seven of the Garden Grove Boulevard businesses have signs in Korean only.

"I think it turned out for the best," Margolin said. "What convinced me was that a Korean businessman might want a Korean-only sign because he doesn't speak English, and if we force him to have an English sign, then American customers would come in and get hostile if he doesn't greet them."

The Living-Room Dialogue series aims to clear up such cultural misunderstandings, Chung said.

Chung said he selected Korean merchants in Garden Grove who speak fluent English so they can better explain ethnic views. Deputy City Manager Mike Fenderson recommended residents who would want to learn about other cultures.

Dick Hain, 69, who grew up in Garden Grove and is a member of the Sister City Association between Garden Grove and Anyang, South

"I feel very positive about these living-room talks."

Human Relations Commission member Ho Young Chung

Korea, will participate.

"I think it's a terrific opportunity to learn about each other," Hain said. "We all have the tendency to live in little boxes, but I think understanding each other is a way to improve and better the community."

Mayor Walt Donovan, also a participant, said the talks should dispel some people's beliefs about racism in Garden Grove.

"There's a wide spectrum of what people think," Donovan said. "Some people are very bigoted, but I don't know if that is the true feeling of the community."

Chung agreed that few extremists live in the city but said they are outspoken so their views tend to dominate as the voice of the community.

To counter that, Chung said, he joined the Human Relations Com-

mission last year, learned to seek help from social organizations and encouraged civic activism in the Korean sector.

Otherwise, the hard-liners will win, Chung said.

He cited the defeat in 1988 of plans to build the Korean Evangelical Church of Orange County in a mostly Caucasian neighborhood along Lampson Avenue. A council majority sided with residents who said the church would worsen traffic and noise problems despite city and consultant reports indicating little effect on traffic.

Koreans answered with accusations of racism.

"Most problems come from racial misunderstandings," Chung said. "I feel very positive about these living-room talks. I know people will come away knowing more about each other."