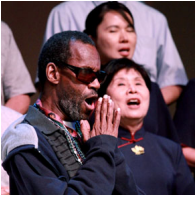


## Tzu Chi Celebrates 10 Years in Las Vegas

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 10 January 2013 15:11

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Las Vegas is famous as the capital of gambling in the western world. Its neon lights are never dim and its wheels of fortune spin without end. The eyes of the gamblers are glued to the table and their only thought is to win. Nothing else matters in their lives.

But, in another part of the city, there is a different world. In the East Flamingo Library, on October 24, 2012, the lights came on and a group of people in blue and white uniforms gathered to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Tzu Chi in the city.

The branch officially opened its doors on November 19, 2002, with the warm blessings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen who called it "a surprise lotus blooming in the Gambling City". Over the last 10 years, the volunteers have helped many people -- they organized a grocery backpack distribution in the 'Happy Campus' program, visit a Blind and Retirement Center, distribute hot meals at a homeless shelter and do recycling. Through this decade of effort, the volunteers have impressed many Las Vegas residents.

In recognition of this, U.S. House of Representative Shelly Berkley sent her office manager, Tod Story, to give a speech at the anniversary and present an award. Mr Story warmly praised four missions and eight footprints of the foundation and passed on the very best wishes of Representative Berkley.

The evening began with a sign language performance by members of the foundation's U.S. headquarters of the song "Free". Their beautiful lyrics and graceful choreography captured the imagination of the audience. Then the lights were turned off and a video "Today in History" was played; it described the foundation's work in Las Vegas over the past 10 years.

It had a tragic prelude. In 1999, a professor and a group of his students from Taiwan National Chung Cheng University had a fatal car accident in Death Valley; four people died and one was seriously injured. Tzu Chi had no office in Las Vegas, so volunteers came from Los Angeles and Phoenix to care for the students and their families. The graduate student who was seriously injured was hospitalized for more than four months; he was taken care of by a group of caring Las Vegas volunteers. Many became founding members of Tzu Chi office in the city.

As an intersection of major highway routes, Las Vegas is plagued by severe traffic accidents. For the victims and their families, Las Vegas is no paradise but a place of sorrow. Fortunately, Tzu Chi volunteers are there to provide a pit stop for their sad journey and support them to recover from the trauma and return to a normal life.

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