



MENCIUS MANDARIN PRESCHOOL

59 East Putnam Avenue
Greenwich, CT 06830
(203) 540-5770 (tel)
(203) 604-8230 (fax)
www.menciusmandarin.com

For Immediate Release

FIRST BILINGUAL CHINESE-ENGLISH PRESCHOOL TO OPEN IN GREENWICH THIS FALL

**Mencius Mandarin Preschool offers daily bilingual classes,
founded by former Nickelodeon star**

GREENWICH, CT (April 17, 2009) – This fall, don't be surprised if you hear toddlers walking down Greenwich Avenue greet each other with "Ni Hao Ma!" A new Chinese-English bilingual preschool, the first and thus far only one of its kind in Connecticut, is opening its doors in September in downtown Greenwich.

Housed in a spacious classroom on the second floor of First United Methodist Church on East Putnam Avenue and Church Street, Mencius Mandarin Preschool is founded by former television actress Irene Ng, who was the star of Nickelodeon's *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo* from 1996-1998. Ng also played a principal role in the movie *The Joy Luck Club*, in which she spoke only Mandarin.

Ng obtained her B.A. in economics from Harvard University, and was elected to *Phi Beta Kappa*. A fluent speaker of Mandarin and four other Chinese dialects (as well as two other languages), Ng worked for Merrill Lynch as a senior international financial adviser after college for seven years, during which she conducted business in China and Malaysia frequently using Mandarin.

Ng says the experience of both her acting and banking careers combined to lead to her present path. "Because *Shelby Woo* was filmed on a children's network, I was regularly working with child actors. I was so impressed by how passionate and serious they can be, just as much as the adults, about their art and their profession. I really loved and respected their energy."

Ng also traveled frequently with fellow Nickelodeon alumni such as Amanda Bynes and Michelle Trachtenberg—then just "adorable young girls," says Ng—to schools and children's events across the country, to inspire and encourage young children in their education.

Her experience working at Merrill Lynch was equally instrumental in her decision to open Mencius Mandarin Preschool. Her ability to communicate with clients in China and Malaysia in their native language, as well as read and write Chinese, was an immense asset. "It gave me an edge," she says, "especially since in the Chinese culture, doing business is so much about establishing rapport and face-to-face interaction." Ng realized then that she wanted to confer the same skills and advantages to her own children as well as others'.

After almost a year and a half of planning, Mencius Mandarin Preschool is ready to open its doors for the first time this September. Ng will be Administrative Director and will teach the Mandarin half of the daily class lessons (classes are conducted in English in the first half of the day and in Mandarin in the second half). The preschool's Education Director and English Head

Teacher, Sharon Bixler, is from Darien and has over twenty years' experience teaching preschoolers. "My hope is that many parents will share my same desire to give their children the gift of bilingualism, especially in such an important language as Mandarin. It is so much easier for young children to pick up a second language—they seem to do so almost effortlessly," says Ng.

Ng is on the right track: according to a November 2006 *New York Times* article that surveyed 16 public schools in Connecticut state, the number of students studying Mandarin saw a dramatic ten-fold increase from just 2004 to 2006.¹ Most of these students were non-Asian. "It is a language that has just exploded in popularity," says Ng. "When I go to China, I see the parents going out of their way to have their children learn English; why not give our kids an opportunity to learn Mandarin from a very early age?"

The same reasoning prompted billionaire hedge fund manager George Soros to relocate his entire family to Singapore recently. He said he made the move so that his young daughter could learn Mandarin in a native environment. "Greenwich area residents will not need to resort to such a drastic measure starting this September," quips Ng.

Those interested in learning more about Mencius Mandarin Preschool and how to enroll their children should call the School at (203) 540-5770 or visit www.menciusmandarin.com to obtain an admissions application. Open houses are conducted every Thursday morning 8:30am-11:30am until July 2, after which private tours can be arranged. Classes begin on September 11, 2009. Hours are 8:30am-11:30am daily, Monday to Friday. Children must be between 2 years and 5 years old.

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Contact:

Irene Ng

Founder and Administrative Director

Tel: (203) 540-5770

Email: Irene_Ng@menciusmandarin.com

¹ Winnie Hu, "Non-Asians Show a Growing Interest in Chinese Courses," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2006.