



COURTESY PHOTO/SRAVASTI ABBEY

Sravasti Abbey celebrated five years in Newport with a gathering Oct. 11. The birthday party included a joyous procession of monastics and guests. Cheryl Harrison from Seattle, right, blows the conch to lead the way. In the Tibetan tradition, the conch calls practitioners to meditation. She is followed by Venerable Chonyi, Venerable Semkye, Venerable Jampel, Venerable Chodron, Venerable Lodru and Venerable Gache.

Buddhist abbey celebrates five years in Newport

BY JANELLE ATYEO
OF THE MINER

NEWPORT — Sravasti Abbey, the Buddhist community near Newport, is celebrating five years of progress. Over those years, the ranch site in the Spring Valley has been transformed into a community where people gather to hear and practice the teachings of the Buddha.

About 50 people gathered there to celebrate the birthday Oct. 11.

"Generally birthdays are about 'me,'" Venerable Thubten Chonyi said, but at the abbey they're celebrated differently. "We share with other people, all who have been beneficial and helpful for us, and we meditated on their kindness."

The celebration acknowledged the contributions from the thousands of people around the world involved in bringing the monastery into fruition and continuing its life, she said.

Sravasti's founder, Ven. Thubten Chodron, bought the property in October 2003, and moved there with two cats. Now the community supports five monastics, six trainees and a number of laypeople from the area who visit as guests.

The abbey's latest project is a new monastic residence, the

Gotami House. When it's completed in late spring or summer, it will house up to 12 people.

Four monastics have been ordained at Sravasti since its founding. The first three nuns, including Chonyi, were Chodron's students at the Dharma Friendship Foundation in Seattle, where Chodron taught for 10 years before moving to Newport.

Last month, the abbey ordained its first monk, Ven. Thubten Jampel, who is the grandson of Newport resident Barbra Parker.

Because Sravasti is the first, and so far only, place in America where monastics can be ordained in the Tibetan tradition, more and more people are discovering the abbey.

The community is taking the growth one building at a time.

"Ven. Chodron wants to be very thoughtful about the development of the community and not rush it," Chonyi said.

She described how becoming a monastic is a slow process that

takes much preparation and contemplation. In the same way, the idea is for the community to grow slowly and organically.

The monastics' work reaches far beyond the abbey grounds. Chodron regularly gives talks in Newport at CREATE Place, or currently, the United Church of Christ. Chodron is giving a seven-week workshop, "Healing Anger" each Tuesday at 7 p.m. through Nov. 18. The ecumenical classes cover practical ways to work with your mind in various situations in life. Chodron also teaches around the region and internationally.

The other monastics in the community are also involved in teaching. Vens. Semkye and Chonyi are currently teaching a class on meditation in Spokane. They participated last month in the International Day of Peace interfaith celebration in Spokane.

Because of Chodron's connections, the abbey has hosted Buddhist masters from around

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the world as well as well respected American Buddhist scholars. Last weekend, Ven. Geshe Thupten Phelgye visited from India and

gave teachings on compassion.

And the abbey is getting attention from around the world. Recently, a Korean film company visited Sravasti to film part of a documentary on Buddhism in America. Those from the abbey community are happy to be in Newport. Chonyi described the

positive connections they've had with people in the community – from workers at the hardware store, to the veterinary clinic, to those helping with the construction currently. "It's a very warm exchange," she said. "We feel a part of the community and want to give back."