

# Retirement gives artistic talent chance to blossom

Huang Hanting and Shen Li

After retiring many feel lost as they don't know what to do with all the extra time they have.

Not so for Xi Songlin in Xiaomiao Village in Xuhang Town, Jiading District. He has found retirement a gateway to a new and beautiful world.

Xi, 65, has loved painting since he was a child. Before retirement, he was too busy to paint, but now his desire has returned and he is teaching himself Chinese painting.

In 2007, Xi bought a brush from street peddlers, dipped it into pigments, held his breath and made his first colorful stroke on a piece of rice paper.

The beginning was very difficult. He practiced repeatedly. He taught himself by looking at photos of Chinese paintings, yet he did not feel free to use the brush and colors.

One afternoon, while he was learning from a peony painting and, he unintentionally knocked over a glass and the water splashed onto the palette.

It mixed the red and white and formed a new pink color. He dipped his brush into the pink and casually painted a stroke.

It was perfect. Xi felt encouraged. Soon afterwards he had created his first peony flower painting on rice paper.

After years of practice, Xi has his own painting techniques. His peony paintings

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are bright and impressive.

In 2011, Gu Huizhen, 74, who lives in the same village asked Xi to teach her painting. Xi recalled how difficult it was when he started painting and he agreed.

One year's later, in the calligraphy and painting contest of "Lifetime Learning Week" in Jiading, both the teacher and student received awards and the Xi's school of peony won acclaim from the audience.

Sharing happiness with others is better than enjoying it alone. Every week, Xi will teach his peony painting style to a class of disabled people, who want to learn calligraphy and painting. Some of them have lost their fingers in accidents, some are deaf and others are difficult in controlling the brush.

Seeing that each student

had his own difficulties, Xi has found a way to help them overcome their obstacles.

In the third class, student Dai Fangying tried to draw a peony, who became the first student in the class to make a whole painting of peony successfully.

"I started without knowing anything of painting and now I can draw a beautiful peony. It is all owing to the teacher Xi who spares no efforts in teaching," Dai said.

Xi also likes to do handicrafts. One day his grandson gave him a difficult task — making a low-carbon handicraft. But what does "low-carbon" mean? It really troubled him at first. But after his grandson's explanation, Xi understood its meaning. He asked his friend from the village to give him some dry straws, then he collected some cardboard, an old bamboo basket and waste cloth.

Days later, he created a 3D straw sculpture of "Old Man Fishing on the Bank" and a 3D cardboard sculpture of "Little Rabbit."

**Above: Xi Songlin creates a painting of peonies in his own style.**

**Right: Xi teaches a pupil some of the skills required to paint the flowers.**



# Inspiring bond between one man and his dog



Qin Pan pats his guide dog Ribbe. The two are almost inseparable, with Ribbe acting as the "eyes" of sight-impaired Qin.

Ran Tao and Ruben Shen

QIN Pan has been severely sight impaired for many years. But the 66-year-old Taoyuan Community resident in Jiading Town has found his "eyes," which is what he calls his guide dog, Ribbe.

The two are nearly inseparable.

Ribbe helps Qin when he goes to the hospital, supermarket or wet market.

"Whenever we go to the Century Mart, Ribbe would guide me to the place selling bean products because I often go there," Qin said.

Qin said he loves Ribbe's calm demeanor. Qin often goes to the Jiading Disabled Federation for meetings, which can last up to three hours. Ribbe just lies there waiting patiently until the meeting is over. Many are surprised that "such a big dog lies there so peacefully."

Qin says he feels safe because of Ribbe. On the road, Ribbe will ensure Qin avoids any danger.

On one occasion, a sedan suddenly made a right turn that Qin was not aware of. Ribbe guided Qin to turn left immediately and they successfully avoided the sedan.

"I need to hold his leashes with my left hand so if there is an accident the guide dog will

help me from being hurt," Qin says.

On another occasion, when a young boy riding a bike on Qin's left side, the cyclist suddenly accelerated the bike and turned right.

Seeing the bike would hurt Qin, Ribbe sprang out and helped Q in avoid being hit. However, Ribbe was injured seriously by the bike.

Back at home, Qin found that Ribbe had a deep scratch on its left leg and dried blood was mixed with its fur.

"Ribbe stayed calm during the accident. He didn't bark and guided me home silently," Qin says. "I know he was in pain and I felt so bad for him."

At the first time when Qin brought the dog into the Century Mart, he was stopped by the security guard. He tried his best to explain that Ribbe is a specially trained guide dog rather than a common dog. He will not bark and never bites. However, the guard still refused to let them in.

Later, to Qin's big surprise, the store's manager called Qin and said he and Ribbe were welcome any time to the store.

The central government issued a policy in August 2012 that allows guide dogs to enter public venues. Now Qin can take buses and go shopping with his beloved dog freely.