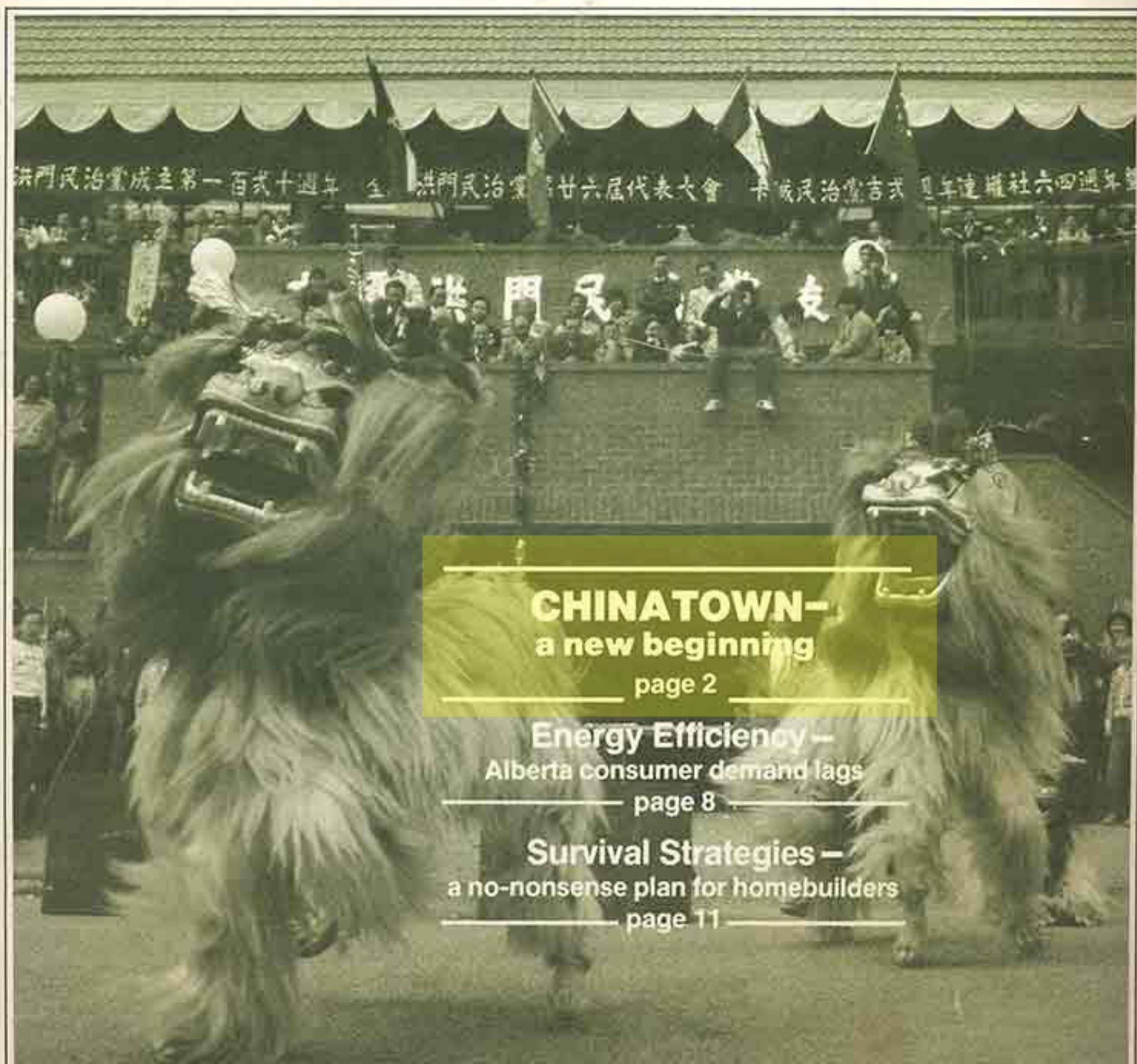


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Landmark

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which is being augmented by a spate of private, commercial developments. "This is a first for Chinatown," says Bill Pang, proudly surveying his months-old meat market. The market is one of the city's largest and most modern and it is doing, says Pang, a bustling business, as are other businesses like the restaurants and the Star Theatre, which features Chinese movies.

The Revival of Chinatown

A decade ago, Chinatown seemed done for. The community, established at Centre Street and 3rd Avenue S.E. about 1911, survived the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1930s depression that ended the influx of Chinese immigrants. But the 1966 Calgary Downtown Master Plan sounded its death knell — a freeway proposed through 2nd and 3rd Avenues would have obliterated all of Chinatown. By the 1970s, Chinatown was literally falling down, a combination of a development freeze and a community waiting to see what would happen with the freeway. Finally, a city task force recommended an end to civic indecision; the 1974 Chinatown Design Brief urged the restoration of homes and the building of new low-cost housing to turn the 48 acres, which house 800, into a comfortable residential area. To accomplish the rescue, city council proposed a Neighborhood Improvement Program but senior levels of government decreed the area too run down to be rehabilitated. Instead, the city opted for site clearing and rebuilding.

For many Calgarians, the long battle to save Chinatown seemed lost. But when the Chinese ushered in New Year's in 1979, 700 turned out for the festival and hundreds more were turned away, a record attendance that had Chinese leaders heralding a new era.

"Co-operation on this scale has never happened to the Chinese community," said Victor Mah, mindful of the three dozen powerful groups active in Chinatown. "I think this is the beginning of something really good." Indeed, two highrise building complexes had recently opened, four others were under way, new restaurants, stores, a bakery,



book, gift and import shops had been opened.

"It was a new beginning," says Mah today, looking forward to construction beginning later this year on a still unnamed AHC senior citizens' project sponsored by the United Calgary Chinese Association (UCCA) and the Chinatown Lions' Club. "It's difficult because we're right next door to the downtown core," he says of efforts to preserve the community. "But Chinatown is, first of all, for people. If lots

of people live there, it's going to be a vibrant community."

Mah, president of the society created by the Lions and the UCCA to sponsor the new project, sees signs of that vibrancy. Enrollment at the Chinese school soared this year to 500 from 300; Chinatown's population, which declined 21 per cent between 1971 and 1973, has leaped to an estimated 2,000.

"Just drive down and look at all the new buildings," suggests Koehler, noting AHC and AHMC are involved in the majority of new structures. "The two corporations have really helped to develop Chinatown as a viable residential community," Mah agrees. "We are a minority and have been overlooked by government agencies in the past. But the Chinese community is very grateful now for the projects provided by the provincial government.

"AHC, in co-operation with tongs (family associations), churches and service clubs, has financed three Senior Citizens Self-contained residences. The Oi Kwan I, an 11-storey, 56-unit complex, was sponsored by the Oi Kwan Foundation and cost about \$2.25 million when it was completed in 1976. The Oi Kwan Foundation went on to sponsor Oi Kwan II, a 15-storey, 126-unit, \$8.3 million project scheduled for completion in the

summer of 1984. The UCCA and the Lions sponsored the third senior citizens project, a 104-unit, 16-storey, \$6 to \$7 million highrise now being designed. AHMC CHIP loans have financed the Mah Family Estates, a five-storey, 43-unit apartment building costing \$1.8 million and approved in 1978; the Yuk Sum Ng family's Ng Tower Centre, a 13-storey, 132-suite, \$4.25 million project approved in 1978 and the Dat Coon



Lower middle: "To Ponder on a Purchase," a watercolor by Sharon Holmes.

group, says the Freemasons fall into "the middle of the argument." It's good for the Chinese community to have "more shops, better lighting," and a general clean-up, he says, but landowners must not get too greedy "or an oil company will buy it all up and there will be no more Chinatown."

And while the wrangling goes on, the club goes about its own redeveloping. The Freemasons have moved into their second floor meeting rooms in the recently opened AHMC-financed project and the apartments — 46 bachelor, eight one-bedroom and eight two-bedroom — are 25 per cent occupied (March). Kwan next expects to

go ahead with an application for a building permit for a three-storey, retail-residential complex planned for 2nd Avenue S.E. "We're going to stick in Chinatown," he says.

In the midst of the arguments, some of the Chinese community are threatening not to stay, but having

survived this long, against all odds, most of the community echoes Jack Fern's prediction of a great Chinatown one day. In the Ng Tower Centre, some 53 of the future generations are supposed to be having a nap in the Children's Palace daycare centre. A dark-haired little Chinese girl peeks out from between her fingers at a tow-haired little Occidental boy pretending to be asleep on the next pallet. The two dissolve in giggles, instantly stemmed when a supervisor looks in. The children's co-operation is being repeated by civic and provincial government officials working together with the Chinese community to build a new, revitalized and vibrant community.