



A WINSTON-SALEM COUPLE, Maninvone Maria and Khampaseuth Micha Phommachanh, who came to this country from Laos, bring gifts of flowers and incense on a pillar and offer prayers, rubbing ceremonial gold leaf into one of the new building's three pillars.



MAYOR INA MAE MINTZ of Bolivia hangs a garland of flowers on the support pillar in a gesture of community goodwill as translator Todd Poch and Association President Southone Hemvong look on.

Buddhists And Well-Wishers Break Ground At Temple Site

BY SUSAN USHER

Joined by supporters, Buddhists from North Carolina and elsewhere converged on a wooded area near Bolivia Sunday bearing gifts of food, flowers, incense, money and goodwill.

Some traveled from as far away as Thailand, California and Florida to attend the elaborate ground-breaking ceremony for a \$640,000, 10,700-square-foot Thai-style multipurpose building. The building is the first new construction at the Buddhist Association of North Carolina's 20.9-acre temple site on Midway Road.

Ten monks seated in a single row on an elevated platform intoned continuous chants in Thai as the first pillar was set by a Lanier's Marine Construction crew, the steady tone accented by the rhythmic banging of a pile driver. The presiding monk, Chao Khun Phra Yanavarodom of Thailand, sat at the far end of the row, beside the tiered altar on which stood a figure of Buddha, a five-candle candelabrum with lotus flowers and incense burners. Chao Khun holds the second-highest ranking of all Theravada Buddhists.

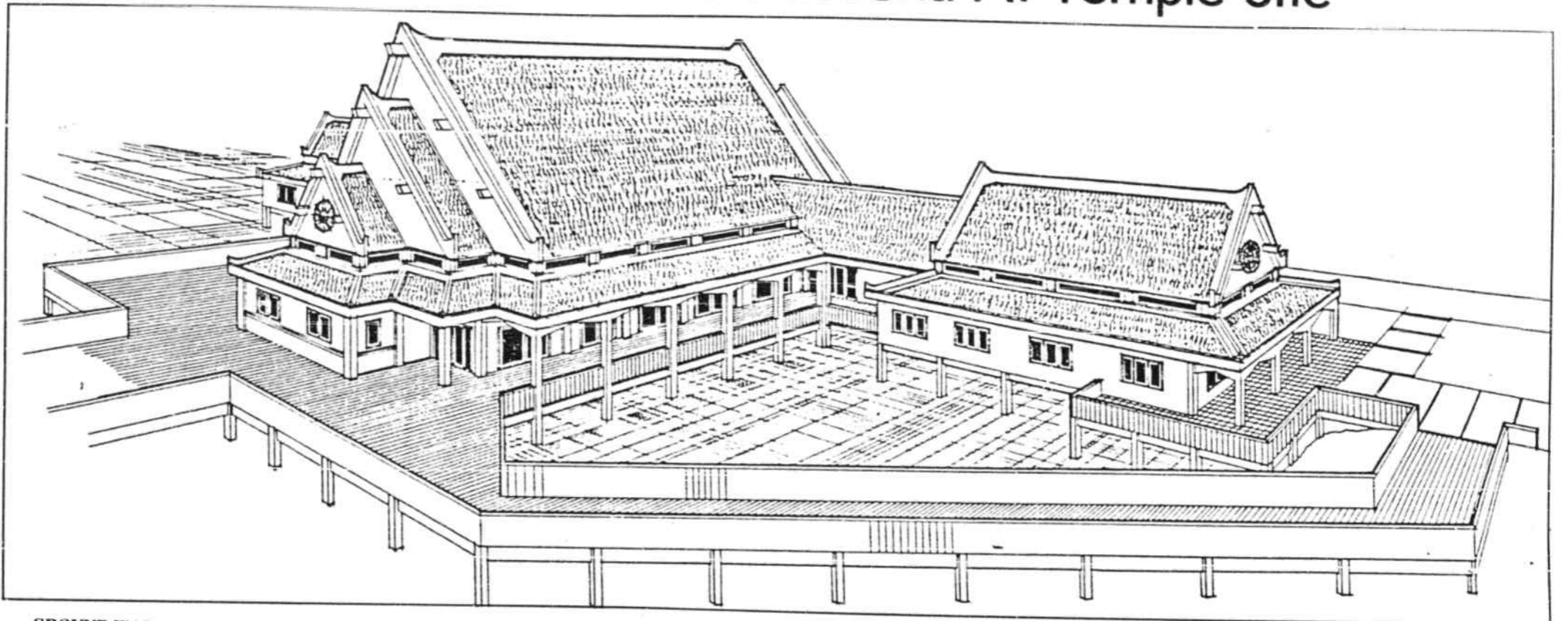
As the chanting continued, the audience participated silently, taking hold of a single white string circulated through the crowd and around the construction site—a thread symbolizing the unity of the community in the construction effort, explained Southone Hemvong, president of the association.

"I feel great," Southone said later in the morning as he greeted visitors. "I don't know how to express it but I feel very, very happy."

Project architect Surapon Sujavanich of Apex was among the many visitors snapping photographs of the event.

While the ceremony was conducted in Thai, Todd R. Poch of Wilmington, who works with the association's executive committee, interpreted in English.

Also during the ceremonies, the presiding monk presented three sacred pieces of wood, sent by the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand,



GROUND WAS BROKEN SUNDAY for this 10,700 square foot Thai-style multipurpose building, the first structure to be built on the Buddhist Association of North Carolina's temple grounds on Midway Road.

which were fastened to the concrete pillar. Recalling the sacred wooden pillars used in older Thai temples, they symbolize the three concrete pillars that will provide the primary support for the new structure.

Mayor Ina Mae Mintz of Bolivia attached a garland of flowers, also a symbol of goodwill. She was one of several guests from the surrounding community there to express good will and learn more about the Buddhist religion. These included County Planner John Harvey and his wife, as well as representatives of several local churches.

While only one pillar was set in the ground Sunday, assembled visitors also brought tributes for the remaining two pillars, which lay on the ground nearby. They brought flowers and incense, and rubbed small bits of ceremonial gold leaf into the concrete pillars, making wishes or offering silent prayers as they kneeled.

Visitors also brought gifts of various types for the saffron-robed monks, who own nothing of their own and depend on their community for food, clothing and other essentials.

Chao Khun Phra Yanavarodom then offered blessings to the assembled guests and, as they passed by him, used a cluster of reeds to sprinkle them with lustral or holy water.

After platters of traditional Thai dishes were presented to the monks, the guests also dined.

The multipurpose building marks the beginning of a continuous building program expected to cost

between \$3 million to \$4 million when completed. The year-old temple is the 41st in the United States for the traditional Theravada school of Buddhism. It will serve as a worship center for Buddhists residing in an area between temples in Atlanta, Ga., and Washington, D.C. To the west and north the nearest temples are in Chicago and Oklahoma.

This first building will be com-

pleted in three stages that include a hall for worship services and discussions and a library.

The two resident monks of the monastic community, Wat Carolina Buddhajakra Vanaram, now live in a

small, wood frame house on the property. Its cramped quarters also serve as an assembly room for the weekend visitors who drive sometimes great distances to join fellow Buddhists in worship.

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