Lea Walker is a China native who runs the U.S. Chinese Culture Center in Columbia, which sends Americans to China to teach English.

S.C. INCREASING LINKS TO CHINA

By WAYNE WASHINGTON

China takes center stage as the Olympic Games open today, with the eyes and ears of the world focusing on that vast and, to most westerners, little-understood nation.

Some in the Midlands will be curious about more than the shiny new venues or the story lines. They see the Games as a chance to improve understanding of China, and, perhaps, warm relations that are often chilled by cultural and political differences.

"This is a very meaningful, historic event," said Lea Walker, a China native who runs the U.S. Chinese Culture Center in Columbia, which sends Americans to China to teach English. "China has thrown the door wide open and is trying to catch up with the rest of the world. This event is a window."

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CHINA
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Rich Harrill, director of USC’s International Tourism Research Institute, is convinced Americans will like what they see through that window.

USC has a burgeoning relationship with China highlighted by student exchanges and research ties.

“It’s not inconceivable that we find Asian firms to be housed in the Innovista,” Harrill said of the high-profile research infrastructure project USC has built in Columbia. “It’s not just about education.”

Harrill said China-affiliated and China-owned companies employ more than 1,400 people in South Carolina. China, he added, was the state’s fifth-largest export market in 2007, with more than $623 million in goods sold there.

Education is at the heart of the relationship between USC and China.

In 2007, 49 students from USC traveled to China to study while 234 Chinese students came to USC.

Harrill said he has traveled to China a dozen times in the past five years, most recently this spring, when he was part of a USC delegation led by provost Mark Becker.

“This is a new period of time for China and for Asia,” said Becker, who has been to China twice so far this year. “For the Chinese, these Games are their coming out party. The whole world will see that China has emerged as a world player.”

For Walker, the Games will be a chance to see glimpses of home — from home.

Walker, a naturalized U.S. citizen, was born in Shandong Province, along the eastern edge of China.

She came to study at USC in 1992 and decided to stay.

Walker opened the U.S. Chinese Culture Center a decade after her arrival.

Now, from her adopted country, she will watch on television as her native country hosts the Summer Games.

The sailing competition, Walker has learned, will be held in Qingdao, a major seaport in

THE CHINA CONNECTION

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As the world focuses on China during the Beijing Olympics, it's a good time to review Chinese connections to the S.C. economy. The country's investment in the state is growing, making it one of the more vital foreign partners to South Carolina.

- Eleven Chinese companies have invested $280 million in South Carolina. They employ 1,429 people. The largest employer — Techtronic Industries North America — has 650 workers at facilities in Anderson, Liberty and Pickens.
- Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi traveled to South Carolina in 2006 to visit Haier, a refrigerator manufacturer in Camden. Her visit coincided with an announcement of the first phase of a $100 million, 1,000-job expansion. Today, the company employs 225. Haier Group, a Beijing 2008 sponsor, was the first Chinese company to establish a manufacturing plant in the United States.
- South Carolina's exports to China topped $623 million in 2007, making it the state's fifth largest export market.
- The S.C. Department of Commerce opened an office in Shanghai in 2005. And Commerce organizes trade missions to China, with the next group heading over Sept. 4-13. Representatives from five companies will have appointments in Shanghai, Xiamen, Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Others on the trip will be county economic development directors, board members from the State Ports Authority and two college professors.
- Harco Track Technologies in West Columbia signed an agreement in 2007 with the Chinese Ministry of Railways to provide track maintenance and services. The contract is expected to generate $350 million in revenue over four years.

SOURCE: S.C. Department of Commerce

USC & CHINA

The ties that bind the University of South Carolina and the world's most populous nation:

Scholars
- USC has hosted three visiting professors from China since 2006.
- In 2007, there were 234 students from China who attended USC; 49 USC students traveled to China to study.

Business
USC's Moore School of Business offers a 24- to 36-month "China track" course of study featuring a six-month internship with a Chinese-owned firm, usually in Shanghai or Beijing.

SOURCE: USC

Tourism
USC's College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management began a China program in 2005, encouraging research collaboration and student exchange as a bridge between the two nations.

"We love both countries," she said. "We don't want them to hate each other or be enemies. We want both countries to be friends."

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