

**RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TEXAS – APRIL 22, 2020** – A group chat about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a donation of more than \$1,000 to the UTRGV Student Food Pantry and 1,000 face masks to two Rio Grande Valley police departments.

The people participating in the chat included members of the Chinese Student & Scholar Association at UTRGV. It took them just a few days to raise the funds, after the discussion started on WeChat, a messaging and social media app.

"The people in the chat group were very enthusiastic about it, and we were able to raise that amount very quickly," said Dr. Bin Wang, a UTRGV professor and associate dean for Administration, Graduate Studies and Research in the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship.

She credited the organization's current chair, Dr. Lin Jiang, associate professor in the UTRGV School of Social Work, and former chair Ben Xu, assistant professor in the UTRGV Mechanical Engineering Department, for organizing the fundraiser.

Jiang said generosity is part of the Chinese culture.

"This spirit of charity has been reflected in our Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. So, I think as the Chinese faculty and students here, we love our UTRGV, and we love the Rio Grande Valley and Texas," she said. "We would like to help and we would like to give."

Xu said they realized some university students won't have any income because of the COVID-19 pandemic and won't have money to buy groceries.

"A lot of people in this group chat, they are UTRGV faculty, so we definitely care for our students," he said.

Then the group discussed helping police officers.

"They're also fighting on the frontlines," Xu said.

The group raised \$1,330 for the UTRGV Student Food Pantry, and donated 1,000 masks to the police departments of Edinburg and McAllen.

While the Chinese Student & Scholar Association at UTRGV led the initiative, Xu said, donors also included group members' family and friends and other members of the Chinese community.

"This is a donation from the entire Chinese community here," Xu said.

For many who have family and friends in China, this isn't the first donation to help relief efforts in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Xu, who graduated from Wuhan University in the city where the virus was first detected, donated funds as an alum in February.

Associate Dean Wang said the response to help others has been remarkable.

"Because we have all those ties to China, we knew early on how bad this virus is or can be. And it's very scary," Wang said. "It really touched me to see how people got together through this pandemic.

"Globally, it's a very unfortunate event, but everywhere we see – social media, news on TV – we see that people are trying to do what they can do. I'm really grateful that we're all coming together to help each other."

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