

Wenjiang: Model of 'better city, better life'

By ZHAO SHIJUN

With the theme "Better City, Better Life", the 2010 Shanghai World Expo opens today in Shanghai.

Posters with the slogan are everywhere, so Expo visitors might ask the obvious question — "where are the better cities in China that offer a better life?"

The list might be not very long, but Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan province, is no doubt near the top.

Situated at the heart of the Sichuan Basin — widely known as "the land of plenty" — Chengdu's quality of life was recognized by the UN when it was placed in the organization's Habitat Scroll of Honor in 1998.

The city is heading toward modernization at a steady pace and in a composed manner, allowing its people to benefit from the material gains in a sustainable, growing economy while enjoying the fruits of a millennia-old civilization and well-preserved natural environment.

A role model

Wenjiang district, a newly urbanized area west of downtown Chengdu, is now seen by locals as a model of how to create a better life for residents.

With an area of only 277 sq km, a population of 338,400 and a gross domestic product of 17.1 billion yuan in 2009, Wenjiang's administrators are not keen to promote themselves with just surging statistical figures.

Authorities and residents want the district to be a harmonious combination of prosperity and serenity, modernity and ancient heritage.

Wenjiang has a long history. Recent archaeological discoveries show it was the capital of the ancient Shu Kingdom some 4,000 to 5,000 years ago.

Agriculture has flourished in the area for more than 2,000 years, making it one of the best places to live in China throughout its history. The nearby Dujiangyan Dam built at the upper reaches of the Minjiang River during the Warring States Period (475

BC-221 BC) is the nation's greatest ancient water control and irrigation system, and one that still works today.

The district is still a shining example of good living and business environment as a result of well-positioned plans by local authorities for urban construction and economic development.

While most Chinese cities, especially western cities, are attracting investors to launch big manufacturing projects, Wenjiang chose a different path.

As the district covers only 277 sq km, authorities didn't think it has enough space to host big production facilities. Manufacturing projects also inevitably cause pollution, so planners turned their sights to the service industry to augment traditionally prosperous agriculture.

And the approach to agriculture is totally different from decades ago. Planners don't want to develop grain-intensive production on such a small piece of land, so they decided to grow specific varieties such as flowers and vegetables to meet the demand of Chengdu and other neighboring big cities.

The district now has more than 8,000 hectares of flower farms, about one-third of Sichuan's total.

Quality, rather than quantity, is emphasized, with "organic and pollution-free" the buzzwords.

Living environment

As with many areas in China, Wenjiang district is in an inevitable process of rapid urbanization.

In 1985, the urban area of Wenjiang was less than 2 sq km, with about 30 streets. Last year, the urban area reached 28.6 sq km, with more than 150 streets and 173,000 residents.

Yet avoiding problems from rapid urbanization such as a worsening ecology and deteriorating living conditions is a top concern of the local government.

The authorities have borrowed ancient concepts in mapping out the urban development plan.

The focus of the plan is



Rivers and trees are key elements in Wenjiang's urban design that create a better environment and give the city a sense of life.

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to build a modern city area sustaining its original rural beauty, in what authorities call urban-rural integration.

Just as major parts of the urban area are developed from the countryside, many urban residents are former farmers who have a special love of the nature and are nostalgic about the rural lifestyle.

Flowing rivers, trees, flowers and grass are key elements that the authorities want to highlight in their urban planning.

The urban area is surrounded by about 8,000 hectares of flower farms, which enrich the color of the city all four seasons.

According ancient *fengshui* — which literally means wind and water — lakes and rivers are the soul of a residence or a city.

And people in Wenjiang are proud that they are at the upper part of *fengshui*, with wind and water from the mountains in its northwest passing southeast to

downtown Chengdu.

Most of the residential communities in Wenjiang are built along four major rivers, with their banks covered with evergreen trees and grass.

Another feature of the district is that most of the residences have been built according to the traditional style of the area — two or three-story buildings with white walls and grey roof tiles, with rivers and farmlands within eyesight.

In addition to urban planning, the authorities have also made great efforts to improve the environment, especially in controlling air and water pollution and planting trees and grasses.

More than 91 percent of the city's sewage is treated before it flows to the rivers, with the rate expected to rise.

In addition, 42.25 percent of the urban area is covered by trees and grasses, for a per capital green space of 21.6 sq m.



Many of the residences in the area are built in traditional style — two or three-story with white walls and grey roof tiles.

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From top: Tourists treated to the hospitality of locals: enjoying a cup of tea in a rustic setting or bouquets made by flower farmers.

Service industries set to shine

By BIAN JI

Various levels of governments in regions of China often view globalization and investment as key to progress.

Wenjiang, a district in Chengdu, is no exception, but authorities have declined to follow the path of many other areas by bringing in projects that might harm the environment.

The message the local government is conveying to investors is that the service industry, not manufacturing, is the key.

Modern services including information consultation, sports, healthcare, ecological tourism, cultural creativity and logistics are helping drive the local economy.

Services are expected to become the most important sector in three to five years, accounting for more than half of local gross domestic product.

To promote the development of the service industry and attract investment, the district government plans to invest 60 billion yuan in building eight business zones and parks.

A large part of the investment will be used in building infrastructure.

A traffic network of roads and light rail systems — including the city's subway line 4, an inter-city railway between Chengdu and Ya'an, and an expressway linking Chengdu,

Wenjiang and Qionglai — will offer a quick link between the district, downtown Chengdu and neighboring cities.

While the eight zones are under construction or still in the planning stage, a number of domestic and overseas business have already signed deals with the local government.

On December 20, Qiaobo Snow and Ice World, a company founded by Ye Qiaobo — China's first Winter Olympics champion — signed up to build western China's largest indoor skating facility in Jinma Sports Town.

On December 28, Beijing-based CapitalBio Corp, a biomedicine company, agreed to build a 150 million yuan R&D facility in the Chengdu International Medical Industry Park.

On January 20, representatives of US medical group United Family Hospitals & Clinics visited Wenjiang to talk with local authorities about investing in a hospital in the Chengdu International Medical Industry Park.

Business parks

• The Science Park is designed for hi-tech R&D facilities, with many investors from Taiwan scheduled to begin operations.

• The Guanghua Zone is for high-end residential projects and office facilities. It is also planned to be home to Wenji-

ang's administration center.

• The Sichuan Cultural Industry Zone will highlight businesses as such as museums, performances, television production and animation.

* The Jinma Sports Town is planned to be built in eight to 10 years. A zone featuring sports and leisure tours, it is expected to attract about 7 million tourists, offer jobs for 30,000 to 50,000 locals and generate revenues of 5 billion yuan annually upon completion.

• The Chengdu International Medical Industry Park is a combination of hospitals and medical R&D facilities.

• The planned 100 sq km International Countryside Tour Zone is the largest tourism development in Wenjiang.

The biggest project in the zone is Guosetianxiang Amusement Park that broke ground on April 1. With a total investment of 5 billion yuan, it will be the largest aquatic amusement park in Asia. When complete in three years, it is projected to receive more than 25 million visitors annually.

• The Modern Agricultural Zone is both an organic agriculture production base and agriculture-related sightseeing area.

• The Hesheng Education Zone is a development focusing on vocational training. A number of vocational schools in Sichuan have already agreed to open branches in the new zone.



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After billions of yuan in infrastructure investment, the district offers an attractive business climate to investors.