

# Kent youth ring in new year, Karen style

by [Hillary Sanders](#) - Jan 12, 2014

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**For the Burmese community in Kent, the Karen New Year is a chance to show off traditions that have long been repressed back in Myanmar.**

The sound of the [Karen](#) horn and drums resonated throughout the packed gymnasium, marking the beginning of the 'Don Dances.' The performers moved in perfect sync, not once seeming out of breath.

Members of the Burmese community gathered at the [Kent Covenant Church](#) on Jan. 4 to celebrate the Karen New Year with dance, song, and food.

[The Northwest Communities of Burma](#) (NWCB) organized the event for the seventh concurrent year to bring Karen tradition to the greater Seattle area.

Karen is a state located in the southeast region the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, more commonly known as Burma. Violence against ethnic groups at the hand of the Burmese Army has driven many Karen from their homes since the 1940s, with local populations settling in Oregon, Washington, and Canada.

It is an extremely diverse state, with three major dialects spoken by its people. Several attendees at the new years celebration could speak more than one of these dialects. According to one volunteer, Bel Wah, this can make communication difficult, especially during the two weeks that the youth were practicing their dances for the event.

The dancing was followed by a cooking competition in which Karen dishes were tasted, judged and served to the audience.



Youth perform a traditional Karen New Year dance on Jan. 4 at Kent Covenant Church. (Photo by Hillary Sanders)



*The red, white, and blue clothing and head bands worn during the dance performances demonstrate respect for the Karen flag. (Photo by Hillary Sanders)*



*Dancers of various age groups performed the 'Don Dances,' which are the traditional songs and dance of the Karen people. (Photo by Hillary Sanders)*



*The performers wrap up the Don Dances with a salute to the Karen flag. (Photo by Hillary Sanders)*