

Northgate, diversity and the American Dream

Local businesses offer multicultural customer service

By Marcus Watson

The Northside News

Something special is happening at the corner of Aberg and North Sherman Avenues. American citizens have worked hard, saved money, planned, plotted, dreamed...chasing the eternal lexicon of a free market society. Work hard and you will succeed.

The venerable Northgate Shopping Center now features four minority-owned businesses in various stages of development. The old guy on the block, Sonny Phon, has run the Angkor Thom Market for almost four years.

"We now carry Korean, Philippine, and African foods," he says, "We want to serve as many cultures as we can."

The next veteran in line is the China Palace with its charming owner Dan Qi (pronounced "don-chee", she is better known as Jenny).

"When I first came to America, I worked at a Chinese Buffet. I knew that Chicago and Saint Louis had good Chinese food, but this stuff I was serving was no good."

To that end, she and her business partner, Michael Zhang, hired an award-winning, twenty-year tested Chinese chef. This is paying off as several recent reviews name China Palace as the best Chinese food in Madison.

Jenny was sending money home to put her son through a private high school. He has graduated, and she will send him to the UW this fall.

"I am tired to death," she says, "but I must keep going."

The new kids on the block are the Vang brothers. Tou and Doua (pronounced "too" and "doo-wa") bought the VideoLand store two months ago.

"We've worked in America since 1978," says Tou. "This is our first business."

Specializing in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Latino and some Hmong releases, their selection is like no other.

"All our DVD's have English subtitles," says Tou. "It offers a chance to see what other filmmakers are doing."

The newest comer bought Mattresses and More from Sonny a month and a half ago.

Bou Sok (pronounced "bo sock") and his wife Celina have used their ten years in America working for and learning the retail business. By doing their own buying in Chicago, they have amassed truly unique merchandise.

They kept the name Mattresses and More from the previous owner, but the emphasis is on the "More." Everything from the latest rug design to Asian wedding and funeral wear is on display. More a cultural display than a retail outlet, the store is quite an eye opener.

All of these business people have toiled, sweated, and labored long hours chasing the dream.

Perhaps the simple tenet of one Celina Sok says it all: "You've got food on the table, you're good to go."

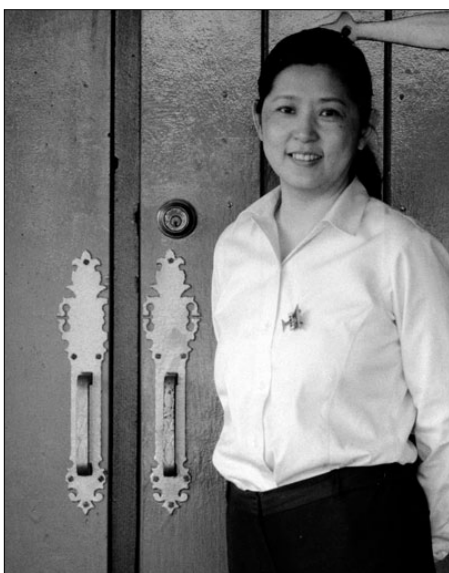


Sonny Phon, owner of Angkor Thom Market

Photos by Marcus Watson



Celina Sok, owner of Mattresses and More



Dan Qi (also known as Jenny), owner of China Palace



Tou Vang, owner of VideoLand



Festivals Galore!

Check out page 17 for a listing of upcoming Northside festivals. Attend all the festivals, and your picture could show up in print!

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