

Pho T&N: Popular Poulsbo Vietnamese restaurant expanding

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Rang and Huyen Nguyen's family restaurant

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POULSBO — When Trinh Nguyen agreed to help her parents in their restaurant for a year after she graduated from high school, she never thought she'd still be there 10 years later.

And she never dreamed that the restaurant would be expanding.

But that's the case for the Nguyen family restaurant, Pho T&N, in the Poulsbo Village Shopping Center. After 10 years of success, they now need to expand. The restaurant will be closed from March 19-29, and then will reopen March 30 at 10:30 a.m. with an additional 1,200 square feet of space.

"We're excited for all the new space," said Trinh, who with her brother, Joe, manages the restaurant. Their parents, Rang and Huyen, are now the cooks.

The additional space will give them a room for large groups, or extra space for guests when their 17-table dining room is full. It will expand their seating capacity from 56 to 86. The kitchen will be enlarged, and a storage area and a break room for employees will be added. In the main dining room, there will be some updating of the decor.

The success of their restaurant isn't something that the family takes for granted.

Pho T&N was purchased by her parents in 2005 after they came to live in the Silverdale area. They left Vietnam in 1998 and spent time with relatives in Seattle.

Her parents, and she and her brother Joe, ages 3 and 7 at the time, attempted to escape Vietnam after the war. The North Vietnamese had taken over and there wasn't any chance of a good life for families like her's who were not wealthy. They went by boat with about 70 others to Thailand, only to be returned to Vietnam.

Later, the family got the opportunity to leave Vietnam for the U.S. and came to Seattle. Then, in 2002, the family moved to Silverdale, and Rang and Huyen began cooking for friends who owned Chung's Teriyaki.

"They wanted to have their own restaurant, but they didn't want to be in competition with their friends," Trinh said. "So they decided to focus on just traditional Vietnamese food."

At first, they thought about only serving Pho, which is a Vietnamese rice noodle dish with broth. It cooks for 25 to 30 hours with many different spices. It is then served with a choice of meat on top and a garnish of onions with various spices on the side.

"I told my parents that this area doesn't really know Pho," Trinh said. "I said 'If we only have Pho, we might not get enough business.'"

So they added other items including fried rice dishes and Banh Mi, which is a Vietnamese-style baguette sandwich.

"We started with just a one page menu," she said. "There were about 40 items. Now we have a three-page menu and many more options for our customers."

Just what's most popular? She can't answer that question.

"We don't have one favorite," she said. "And that's because we put the same amount of care in to each dish we serve."

When the family took over the restaurant from the previous owners, Trinh said some of the previous owner's customers came in and asked why they should try eating there.

"I told them because we have good food," she said. "And I said 'If you don't like it, then the meal is on us.'"

But that never happened.

“My parents are very consistent in how they make our food,” she said. “Our customers love the food. They know when they come here, they’ll get good food and they’ll have a good time.”

The restaurant has gained its popularity through “mostly word of mouth,” Trinh said. Lunch use to be the busiest time, but now they’re busy lunch and dinner. Fridays and Saturdays are the busiest days.

“And when it rains, the place is full,” she said. “Or if it’s chilly.”

That, she said, is because the warmth of the food and the spices help to soothe customers when it’s cold and wet.

“We also are a go-to when it’s flu season,” she said. “We’ve done research on the spices we use and they have many health benefits.”

The name of the restaurant comes from tradition. Many Vietnamese restaurants are named for the Pho dish. But the T&N are a family symbol.

“The T is for Tran, my mother’s maiden name, and the N is for my family name — Nguyen,” she said. “But people who know us call us Joe’s Noodle, after my brother Joe.”

There are two younger siblings in the family who may join the restaurant, and Trinh has two sons who also hope to someday be a part of the business.

“We are really looking forward to the update of the restaurant and all the new things to come,” she said. “We hope to be here for many years to come.”

Pho T&N is located at 19689 7th Ave. NE in Poulsbo. Call 360-394-1601 for more information. Hours are Mondays through Saturdays, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. They are closed on Sundays. They also have a Facebook page where daily specials are posted.



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