

## CELEBRATING ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER ENTREPRENEURS

The **San Diego Business Journal** continues to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in collaboration with the **Asian Business Association San Diego (ABASD)**. We are sharing stories of Asian and Pacific Islander businesses in San Diego County.

Business owners will be celebrated on Thursday, May 20, when the San Diego Business Journal and the ABASD host the 2021 Asian/Pacific Islander Businesses of the Year Awards. The ceremony will include a virtual panel discussion on Access to Capital for Asian and Pacific Islander Small Businesses. Panelists will include : **Javier Iglesias, Sr. Vice President & Business Banking Market Leader of US Bank; Deep Lam, Sr. Vice President, Treasury Management Consultant of Wells Fargo; and Rob Disotell, Chief Lending Officer of California Coast Credit Union.**

Award categories featured at the virtual event are: **Community Leadership, Philanthropic Leadership, Non-profit Partner of the Year, Small Business of the Year, Business of the Year, Corporate Partner of the Year, Bridge Builder of the Year, and ABASD Volunteer of the Year.**

We also want to also thank our sponsors: **Wells Fargo, U.S. Bank, California Coast Credit Union, AT&T, Proven Recruiting, Cox Communications, Sharp Health Plan, and Union Bank.**

As we celebrate this month, we hope you enjoy this second week of inspirational stories and look forward to the awards program on May 20. To register, go to [sdbj.com/bizevents](http://sdbj.com/bizevents).



**Barb Chodos**  
President and Publisher  
San Diego Business Journal



**Jason Paguio**  
President and CEO  
Asian Business Association San Diego

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SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

**ASIAN**  
**PACIFIC ISLANDER**  
**BUSINESSES**  
of the year **AWARDS 2021**

In Association With



**Free Virtual Event**

**Thursday May 20, 2021**  
**2pm - 3:30 pm**

In honor of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, The San Diego Business Journal and Asian Business Association San Diego is proud to present Asian Pacific Islander Businesses of the Year Awards and a panel discussion on Access to Capital for Asian and Pacific Islander Small Businesses in the San Diego region.

**[Register@sdbj.com/bizevents](mailto:Register@sdbj.com/bizevents)**

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Panel discussion on Access to Capital for  
Asian and Pacific Islander Small Businesses in San Diego

MODERATOR



**Jason Paguio**  
President & CEO  
Asian Business Association San Diego



Jason Paguio is President and CEO of Asian Business Association San Diego and the Strategic Partnerships Director for the CalAsian Chamber of Commerce. Jason's civic commitments include serving on the City of San Diego Small Business Advisory Board, Board of Directors of the NTC Foundation (Arts District Liberty Station), LEAD San Diego, the San Diego Community Housing Corporation, and an appointment to San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria's Asian-Pacific Islander Advisory Group.

PANELISTS



**Javier Iglesias**  
Senior Vice President  
Business Banking Market Leader  
U.S. Bank



Javier Iglesias is a Senior Vice President, and the Business Banking Market Leader for the San Diego market. He has been with U.S. Bank since 2012, and his banking career began during college in 1993. Javier is responsible for leading the Business Banking teams and executing an effective strategy to acquire, service and deepen business banking relationships in the market. Prior to his arrival at U.S. Bank, Javier worked for two other large commercial banks in the San Diego Market in a variety of production and leadership roles in the Business Banking segment.



**Deep Lam**  
Senior Vice President  
Treasury Management Consultant  
Wells Fargo Bank



Deep Lam is currently a Senior Treasury Management Consultant with Wells Fargo Bank in San Diego. She has been with the bank for 12 years and in her current position since 2017. She consults with clients on leveraging technology for business operations. Prior to her current role, Deep was a Business Development Consultant for over 9 years serving the San Diego North County Market.



**Rob Disotell**  
Chief Lending Officer  
California Coast Credit Union



Rob Disotell is Chief Lending Officer at California Coast Credit Union, which was founded in 1929 and is the longest serving financial institution in San Diego with \$3 billion in assets and over 200,000 members. Rob brings over four decades of experience in financial services, including over 30 years with a state chartered community commercial bank in the Seattle/Puget Sound region, the last 12 years as Chief Credit Officer. His primary focus has been on Commercial Real Estate (CRE) and Commercial and Industrial (C&I) asset based lending to small businesses. He has been responsible for all areas of lending, portfolio risk management practices, and lending policies and procedures.



# Local Architect Says He is Living the American Dream

**ARCHITECTURE:** International Firm Known for Striking and Prominent Buildings

■ By RAY HUARD

While in high school, **Joseph Wong** helped out in his parents' restaurant with little idea of what he wanted to do with his life.

"I had a very good drafting teacher at San Diego High School," Wong said – **William Clifford**.

"He asked me, 'Joseph, are you planning to attend college?'"

"I said, 'yeah, I will.' He suggested, 'What about being an architect?' It was like a light bulb. I went to the library and looked it up, what is architecture and what is an architect? That was the turning point," Wong said. "I am very grateful for his teaching and encouragement."

Wong went on to earn a bachelor's and master's degree in architecture from the **University of California Berkeley** and a master's degree in landscape architecture from **Harvard University**.

His firm, **Joseph Wong Design Associates**, is internationally known for its work and has designed some of the most striking and prominent buildings in San Diego County.

They include Alexan Little Italy, St. Teresa of Calcutta – the affordable apartment tower under construction in East Village by Father Joe's Villages – Palisade at UTC, Broadway Block in East Village, Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel, and Alila Marea Beach Resort Encinitas.

"I call it the American dream, it really is," Wong said. "Our focus has always been how can we design and build a better city and how can we design and build better housing."



Among the latest projects by Joseph Wong Design Associates is St. Teresa of Calcutta apartment tower for Father Joe's Villages.

## Coming to America

Wong said he came to the United States in 1967 with his parents and his two younger sisters.

"The week we arrived, I remember we all started working at a Chinese restaurant," Wong said.

His family came from Tianjin, the fourth largest city in China where Wong was born. His parents fled to Hong Kong with a goal of moving to the U.S. His grandfather, who lived in Chicago, sponsored the family's move to this country.

Ten years later, Wong opened his architectural practice and worked on small downtown projects at a time when downtown San Diego was a place to avoid at night.



Joseph Wong  
Founder and  
President  
Joseph Wong Design  
Associates

"I started pretty early. We were doing residential housing. That's always my interest," Wong said. "As a team, we really like to see how we contribute our efforts finding projects that will improve the urban environment and make a better place for people."

## Creating Beauty

Wong said he broke into the international market in the 1990s when he won a competition to design an Intercontinental Hotel in Shanghai, China – a competition he didn't expect to win.

Working in China had long been an ambition of his.

"Even when I attended my graduate school and had my practice, I never would have thought that I would design a project in the

place where I was born," Wong said.

Among the projects that Wong listed as his most notable were St. Teresa of Calcutta that will provide housing for the homeless and the Encinitas Beach Resort that caters to people at the opposite end of the economic spectrum.

Wong said the Encinitas Beach Resort is among his favorite projects partly because it was so long in reaching fruition.

"We had worked on this project 20 years ago. Twenty years later, we got it built. It's just a beautiful site. We're excited to see the project completed," Wong said.

Wong said St. Teresa's and other projects he's done for Father Joe's Villages "really humbled me."

"Those kind of social projects, they really create a better and healthier community for the present and also for future generations," Wong said. "We have a responsibility to create beauty that inspires social conscience and engages the community and strengthens our environment." ■

## Joseph Wong Design Associates (JWDA) JWDA Your Trusted Partner

**FOUNDED:** 1977

**FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT:** Joseph O. Wong

**HEADQUARTERS:** Bankers Hill

**BUSINESS:** Architect and design firm

**EMPLOYEES:** 36

**NOTABLE:** The firm has received more than 200 local and national awards.

**WEBSITE:** www.jwdainc.com

**CONTACT:** 619 233 6777

# R3fresh Finds its Niche on Convoy Street

**RESTAURANTS:** Owner-operator Joe Kao Chooses Juice Over Boba

■ By BRAD GRAVES

**Joe Kao** was getting things done starting his business, a café on Convoy Street in Kearny Mesa, when he ran into a snag.

The entrepreneur, now 26, needed someone to guarantee the lease on his new space — a former cell phone store with a brilliant purple wall. So he called his mother, who at the time was in Taiwan.

He remembers his mother's voice over the phone: "You're doing what?"

It all ended well. Kao laid out his business plan for his mother, and she ended up putting her name on the lease. She also put in some money to get the business up and running, and became Kao's business partner.

Today **R3fresh Superfood Café & Juice Bar** is embarking on its fifth year in business. Kao said the business has roughly one half million dollars in yearly revenue.

The venue makes juices, each with a variety of fruits and vegetables. It offers açai sorbet imported from Brazil. Açai is the berry of a certain palm tree.

The business also lets customers build their own superfood bowls. It offers pitaya, coconut and chia puddings with the



Joe Kao  
Owner-Operator  
R3fresh Superfood  
Café & Juice Bar



Sunshine is a mixture of carrot, apple and orange juices with turmeric. It's one of several juices produced and sold by R3fresh in Kearny Mesa.

option of adding granola (made in-house) and fresh fruit.

## A Passion for Food

Joe Kao is from Orange County. He moved to San Diego for work nine years ago. While working at businesses such as retailer **Sur la Table**, he helped friends get their businesses going.

He entertained thoughts of opening his own business. "Food and beverage is where my passions lie," he said.

He had his eye on the bustling Convoy Street food corridor, and for a while considered a boba shop — a shop offering tea

served with edible beads. Seeing what he considered "way too many" boba shops in the district already, he dismissed the idea and pivoted to offering juices and açai.

"I've been juicing my whole life," he said, recounting how he grew up in a household where making juice and concocting juice recipes was an everyday occurrence. And there were no other juice shops on Convoy.

He said R3fresh is one of the healthier options on Convoy, where the typical restaurant emphasizes bold flavors and comfort food.

R3fresh now has a second store, in Fullerton, operated by Kao's brother, Ben Kao. The Kaos do many of their own tenant

improvements, since another family business is renovating and reselling houses. In Joe Kao's space on Convoy, white tile went up over the bright purple wall.

## COVID and Beyond

When COVID hit, Kao made the decision to stay open, and offer take-out only. It was the right move, he said. Revenue declined but it was better than outright closure. Now, he said, he is considering outdoor seating for the store.

The business gets its share of regulars from the surrounding auto dealers and corporate offices on Kearny Mesa.

Looking beyond COVID, Kao is thinking about expanding R3fresh some more. He said he wants to avoid trendier areas such as downtown and North Park, and is looking north, considering small commercial spaces in communities such as Mira Mesa, Del Mar, Carlsbad and San Clemente. ■

## R3fresh Superfood Café & Juice Bar

**R3FRESH**  
SUPERFOOD CAFÉ + JUICE BAR

**FOUNDED:** 2016

**OWNER-OPERATOR:** Joe Kao

**ADDRESS:** 4821 Convoy St.

**BUSINESS:** Café

**EMPLOYEES:** 4

**WEBSITE:** www.r3fresh.com

**NOTABLE:** Kao sits on the board of Blindspot Collective, a local theater group

**CONTACT:** (858) 384-6111



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## Proven Recruiting Helps Cos. Find Needed Talent

**SERVICES:** Firm Aims to Grow Business to \$50 Million

■ By FRED GRIER

In 2007, **Louis Song** and **Ingram Losner** started **Proven Recruiting** as the answer to a growing concern — the fact that most recruiting firms were grueling places to work.

The duo believed that building an employee-centric company with a strong sense of purpose was the key to providing a truly differentiated experience.

Over the last decade, the staffing firm has grown from a team of seven to over 150 staffers across the U.S. with offices in San Diego, Dallas, Austin, and L.A. The company's mission is to connect talented people with meaningful careers.

"We became one of the fastest growing staffing firms in the country," said Louis Song, CEO and co-founder of Proven Recruiting. "At one point we had nine offices but the biggest problem was being able to manage at scale. We consolidated and learned how to be better managers and leaders. Which allowed us to build a foundation without jeopardizing and scaling the business too fast."

### Aiming for \$50 million

The recruiting firm provides consulting and contingent staffing solutions. It focuses on industries including life sciences, technology, finance, accounting and operations. Services range from direct-hire, contract-to-hire, and contract basis.

Taking advantage of the strong life science scene in the region, roughly 80% of



Photo Courtesy of Proven Recruiting.

Over the last decade, Proven Recruiting has grown from a seven person team to a 150-person organization.



**Louis Song**  
CEO and Co-founder  
Proven Recruiting

revenues come from San Diego County. Annual revenues exceed \$18 million, said Song.

"San Diego will continue to be one of the bright spots for drug discovery, pharmaceuticals, and the medical device sector," said Song. "We've got operations in Dallas and Austin. Over the next three years, we see our company growing from our current close to \$20 million to \$50 million, as well as continuing growth out of our Los Angeles office."

Song attributes this success to the company's 'people first' approach and award-winning culture.

### Best Places to Work

The company has been named one of San Diego's best places to work five consecutive years in a row. Although many of its events are held virtually due to the pandemic, Song said his team continues to invest in the human aspect of the business, adding that it holds weekly of virtual team get-togethers as well as a book club.

"We host a book club, three days a week, every single week," said Song. "During the pandemic, we started our Unplugged series. Where we highlight one person every other week and the entire company sit down and has the opportunity ask them about their lives, their upbringing, their religion, and all the stuff that is sort of taboo."

### Leadership

Prior to Proven Recruiting, Song started his career at **Kforce**, one of the largest professional staffing companies in the world. He spent more than 10 years leading an office that generated more than \$40 million in revenue and managed over 70 staffers.

Song's roles prior to recruiting include being a waiter, cashier, hotel maid, party planner, admin assistant, and systems analyst for the **White House Communications Agency**.

Losner's staffing industry experience spans 32 years. He ran his own recruiting business in London between 1988 and 1996. Ingram was a group president for Kforce. He is active in the community and is involved with several local charities and non-profit groups. ■



**Ingram Losner**  
CFO and Co-founder  
Proven Recruiting

### Proven Recruiting



**FOUNDED:** 2007

**CEO:** Louis Song

**BUSINESS:** Business recruiting firm

**HEADQUARTERS:** Sorrento Valley

**EMPLOYEES:** 150

**WEBSITE:** [www.provenrecruiting.com](http://www.provenrecruiting.com)

**NOTABLE:** Co. has offices in San Diego, Dallas, Austin, and LA.

**CONTACT:** [hello@provenrecruiting.com](mailto:hello@provenrecruiting.com)

## Restaurant Operator Follows in Parents' Footsteps

**DINING:** Cris Liang Owns Three Eateries in Kearny Mesa

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

When **Cris Liang** graduated from UCSD with a BS degree in structural engineering in the early 2000s, he never imagined he'd follow in his parents' footsteps and own his own restaurant years later. Chinese immigrants that settled in Mexico before relocating to San Diego, his mother and father owned their own food place, **Palacio Royal**, in Tijuana for nearly 30 years before retiring almost 10 years ago.

In 2014 after seven years working for a local geotechnical engineering firm, Liang, along with business partner **Joon Lee**, opened **Common Theory Public House**, located on Convoy Street. In 2018, he simultaneously launched **Realm of the 52 Remedies**, a speakeasy located right next door to Common, and **Woomiok**, an authentic Korean bone broth place also in Kearny Mesa, the Asian food hub of San Diego.

In 2019, pre-COVID-19, Liang had grown the revenue of his collective businesses, under parent companies **JCL Investment** (Common Theory and Realm) and **LNA Restaurant Group** (Woomiok), to roughly \$3 million, he says. These days, the eateries are conducting about 75% of pre-pandemic sales numbers, conservatively.



**Cris Liang**  
Co-Owner  
JCL Investment



Photo Courtesy of JCL Investment

Opened in 2014, **Common Theory** is the first offering from **Cris Liang** and business partner **Joon Lee** under the **JCL Investment** umbrella. Pre-COVID, the company made \$3M in revenue.

### His Own Growing Family

Much like his parents, the drive to delve into the food service industry was his own growing family, said Liang.

"I remember, I was about 30 years old, I had one baby then and felt like I was put against the ropes. I thought, 'if I don't do this now, take this shot, I might regret it for the rest of my life and might be too old to do any sort of comeback then,'" said Liang, now a father of two. "Joon was running his own fast food restaurant then and I was comfortable with the idea of owning my own restaurant because I grew up working in my parents' place. Throughout high school and college, I paid for

everything myself by working at restaurants, too, so I knew most of the positions well."

With family loans and after dabbling with a few different concept ideas, Liang and Joon opened the 5,700 square foot **Common Theory**, a brewhouse inspired by the local craft beer scene. When the 2,700 square foot Thai restaurant next door closed, Liang immediately took over the lease and turned it into an apothecary-styled venue, resembling a Chinese herbal shop.

### Think Outside the Box

Elsewhere, **Woomiok** is 2,800 square feet and is owned with two additional partners. It

specializes in traditional Korean bone broth, said Liang. The gastronomic approach was made in order to differentiate **Woomiok** from other Asian food places in town, he said, and to introduce something new and authentic to the local culinary scene.

For Lee, it is precisely this idea of thinking outside the box that has made all three of his and Liang's offerings successful.

"I think setting higher standards for food quality, consistency and cleanliness is important," he said. "The actual outcome will always hover around lower than the standards held by us. ■



**Joon Lee**  
Co-Owner  
JCL Investment

### JCL Investment



**FOUNDED:** 2014

**OWNERS:** Cris Liang, Joon Lee

**HEADQUARTERS:** Kearny Mesa

**BUSINESS:** Restaurant group

**REVENUE:** \$3M pre-COVID

**EMPLOYEES:** 35

**WEBSITE:** [www.commontheorysd.com](http://www.commontheorysd.com)

**NOTABLE:** Entrance to the speakeasy is only accessible via Common Theory.

**CONTACT:** [cris@commontheorysd.com](mailto:cris@commontheorysd.com)





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## Recognizing extraordinary efforts

Achieving great things in any community takes courage, vision, and tremendous effort. What each of us does can make life better for everyone.

**We proudly celebrate the great achievements of all the Asian Pacific Islander Business Award nominees.**





## Turning Tough Challenges into Success

### RESTAURANTS: Tofu House Grows During Pandemic and Plans to Franchise

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

**Joonsok Kim**, said he couldn't sleep at all the day it was announced that restaurants had to stop serving food indoors due to the coronavirus pandemic. The owner of **Tofu House**, a casual restaurant serving tofu soup and hot-stone Korean barbecue, said "it was a nightmare for me."

These days, many of the hot-pots are served outdoors under white canopy tents and lit up by strings of light bulbs in the parking spots in front of Tofu House — a move that turned the nightmare into a spotlight on his business.

"So, I was thinking overnight and I woke up at 6:30 in the morning to go to Costco Business Center and pick up the chairs and tents," Kim said. "When I set it up, the tent first in Convoy Street, I was thinking for myself, 'Oh my god, am I crazy in this hot day in July? or what am I doing right now? Am I stupid? No one starts to tent, why only me?'"

Kim was one of the first restaurants to implement a pandemic, outdoor dining model and the fast setup worked in his favor. Former Mayor Kevin Faulconer applauded Tofu House as a model for other restaurants.

Like many other restaurants making it through the pandemic, Tofu House had a reduction in staff, however, last April Kim experienced a 10 percent increase in business from 2019, which he attributes to customers liking Tofu House and wanting to "come back as soon as they can."



Photo Courtesy of Tofu House

Tofu House's Convoy location offers food for dine-in and take out with an expansive outdoor dining setup.



Joonsok Kim  
Owner & CEO  
Tofu House

#### Not Giving Up

Originally from Seoul, Korea Kim came to San Diego at the age of 17 and stayed with his aunt and uncle in El Cajon. He attended **Grossmont College** and transferred to **San Diego State University** where he studied business management.

As a kid, Kim knew he wanted to own his own business and after earning his degree, he worked three jobs to save money and make that a reality. He recalled working from 5 a.m. to 3 a.m. delivering for a dry-cleaning business, vacuuming at a car wash and cleaning at a hotel kitchen.

In three years, he had enough money to start his business and with the help of three friends from South Korea who knew how to cook and needed work they started experimenting with recipes from his one bedroom, one bathroom apartment in La Mesa.

"We were using the bathroom for washing all the vegetables and, you know, making our kimchi and a lot of a recipe, we need a bigger kitchen to exercise but we didn't have enough space so we were using one of the bedrooms in my apartment," Kim said.

He said they cleaned the bathtub very well where they made large jars of kimchi, and chuckled at the memory. Before Kim opened his restaurant, he tested the flavors

of their food by serving about 600 to 1,000 people at their local Korean church.

#### Growing the Business

When he opened his first restaurant in 1998 at the age of 23, Kim said it was well-received because people liked the healthy tofu dishes. One of their most popular dishes is the boiled tofu chef's special, a soup with a variety of seafood, mushrooms and kimchi served to customers in a pot that reaches over 500 degrees Fahrenheit.

One of Kim's goals is to be the In-N-Out Burger of Korean cuisine. Inspired by In-N-Out's business model, every year Kim is narrowing down the Tofu House menu until it reaches nine, stand-out dishes.

He added that this July, Tofu House will open its third location and first franchise a minute away from the SDSU campus with the hopes of introducing his Korean food worldwide. ■

#### Tofu House



**FOUNDED:** 1998

**OWNER:** Joonsok Kim

**LOCATIONS:** Kearny Mesa, Mira Mesa

**BUSINESS:** Restaurant serving healthy tofu soup dishes and authentic Korean cuisine.

**EMPLOYEES:** 26 pre-COVID, 12 today

**WEBSITE:** [www.ustofuhouse.com](http://www.ustofuhouse.com)

**NOTABLE:** Tofu House was recognized by former Mayor Kevin Faulconer for their model of outdoor dining during the pandemic.

**CONTACT:** [ustofuhouse@gmail.com](mailto:ustofuhouse@gmail.com)

## Boba Bar and Desserts Serves Internationally Influenced Treats

### FOOD: Tiffany Tran Turned Her Love of Bubble Tea into a Business

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

Behind each sweet treat served at **Boba Bar and Desserts** is inspiration from shop owner, **Tiffany Tran**'s travels throughout Asia. Before opening her first Boba Bar inside Zion Market, Tran said she didn't have any boba experience, but she always loved boba.

Boba, or bubble tea, are little pearls made of tapioca and cooked up to go in any of the drinks such as milk teas and smoothies served at the storefront nestled in the back corner of a strip-mall on Convoy Street.

"We cook it up for our shop and we cook the boba like every two hours to have it fresh," Tran said. "We coat it in honey and brown sugar, to make it a little bit sweet. And I would describe it kind of like a gummy bear texture. So, it's chewy and it goes on the bottom of your drink."

Tran said they import their boba from Taiwan and as of recent, there has been a national boba shortage which has also impacted her shop's suppliers. Despite this supply chain challenge and not being able to travel for the past year, Tran said the shop has stayed open during the pandemic to serve its customers.



Tiffany Tran  
Owner  
Boba Bar and  
Desserts



Photo Courtesy of Tiffany Tran

Boba Bar and Desserts serves puffed — soft serve custard wrapped in a soft bubble waffle and decorated with toppings.

Through it all, Tran said people have been grateful that their shop has been open and some of their customers have been coming consistently for the past five years. She runs the Convoy location, while her husband mainly runs the National City shop and her dad operates the original location at Zion Market.

#### Family Business

Tran spent part of her childhood in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and then from the age of 9 grew up in San Diego. She continued to spend her summers in Vietnam, where her dad owned restaurants and as a kid, she fantasized about opening her own café.

She earned her degree in Behavioral Neuroscience from the University of San Diego, and after graduation, Tran opened Boba Bar at the age of 21.

"We just happened to open the boba shop right after I graduated because I hadn't applied to any like pharmacy or optometry school yet, that is what I was planning to do, but I decided to not do it and then try out the boba business and then I really liked it," Tran said.

It was her dad's idea to start the first one inside of Zion Market and since then they have grown the business to approximately 30 employees across three locations.

#### Fresh Ingredients

One of the things that makes Boba Bar stand out among other bubble tea shops, is the commitment to fresh ingredients for authentic flavors, said Tran. For instance, every day, her dad cuts about 80 percent of the fruit by hand.

In addition to the boba they import from Taiwan, Tran said they cook their

own brown sugar for the popular Brown Sugar Milk tea, which is something she said not a lot of shops can say they do.

One example of Tran making a spin on an Asian dessert is Boba Bar's puffed — an Instagram-worthy treat with inspiration from Chinese waffles. The soft waffles almost look like giant bubble wrap around soft serve custard and a sprinkling of colorful toppings.

"We try to make it look really pretty, except now that it's COVID, everything is a to-go order, so it's not as pretty, but it's still good to-go in a cup — we still try to make it look pretty and then decorate it," Tran said. "You know how some places, the food looks really good, but then it doesn't taste that good. We try to make it look good and taste good." ■

#### Boba Bar and Desserts



**FOUNDED:** 2016

**OWNER:** Tiffany Tran

**LOCATIONS:** Kearny Mesa, National City

**BUSINESS:** Boba Bar and Desserts serves up bubble teas, acai bowls and soft serve treats with a soft waffle cone called "puffed."

**EMPLOYEES:** About 30 employees

**INSTAGRAM:** @bobabarsd

**NOTABLE:** Boba Bar imports their boba from Taiwan and cooks their own brown sugar in house for their Brown Sugar Milk Tea.

**CONTACT:** [bobabarsd@gmail.com](mailto:bobabarsd@gmail.com)



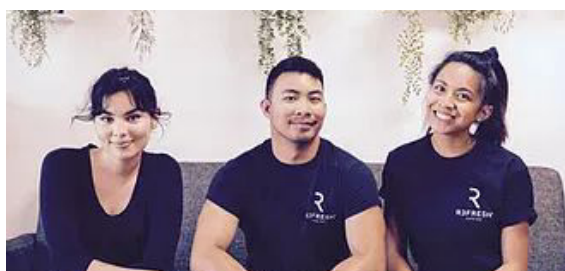


Asian Business Association San Diego represents the interests of more than 30,000 Asian-owned businesses countywide.



**50K+ PEOPLE**

Employed by Asian-owned businesses in San Diego County



**\$4+ BILLION**

Annual gross sales generated by Asian-owned businesses in San Diego County



**\$1+ BILLION**

Annual payroll generated by Asian-owned businesses in San Diego County

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