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 are proud to present their 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
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.
Bennett Peji Puts Community Before Self

**NONPROFIT:** Leader Advocates for Diversity in San Diego

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**By FRED GRIER**

Bennett Peji, has had a career-long focus on innovative design solutions, strategic brand marketing, and sustainable community engagement.

A native of the Philippines raised in Claremont, Peji’s early life is a common story of immigrants. He had little money growing up but plenty of love. Like many working-class families he bounced from apartment to apartment, neighborhood to neighborhood.

In 1987, Peji went on to found **Bennett Peji Design** and has been at the forefront of some important undertakings in the San Diego region.

“I am a passionate advocate for a sustainable organization and community development through innovative thinking and creative design,” said Peji. “Across my career, I have had the honor of driving high-performance teams to succeed in mission-critical projects focused on social responsibility, impact investing, and public partnerships.”

**International Design Expert**

Today, Peji is one of San Diego’s top creative minds and an expert of civic and culturally minded design, civic engagement and brand consulting.

His mantra is “Form follows culture,” which he encompasses in the work he does at his firm, by creating branding and spaces that cross cultural divides.

Peji’s career has taken him around the world to lecture in 11 countries and led him to be civically engaged as a board member of **California Humanities**, **La Jolla Playhouse** and **Urban Discovery Academy Foundation**.

“I am an advocate for diversity and inclusion. I’m proud to say that my employees at my own design firm over the years have come from 22 different countries and have brought their unique cultural perspectives to helping generate truly innovative solutions,” said Peji.

**Making Impact**

In 2014, Peji joined as vice president at the **Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation** for six years. Peji led the winning proposal for $25 million to create the first city-funded, diversity-focused business entrepreneurship center and accelerator in San Diego, called **Connect All at the Jacobs Center**.

Peji’s work is the manifestation of a push to make our economy much more inclusive. “I firmly believe that innovators can come from any neighborhood, even our most underserved and overlooked neighborhoods,” he said.

Stepping down last year, he now spends majority of his time serving as the chief innovation officer of the **Filipino School** and chairman of the board of **California Humanities**.

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**Advising and Elevating Prestige Brands**

**MEDIA:** Joon S. Han Strategizes How to Bring Businesses into New Media

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**By NATALLIE ROCHA**

Joon S. Han has made his career out of advising businesses and sharing his insight with others. His newest venture, **Trifecta New Media Group**, launched this year with a goal of advising established brands on how to enter into new platforms from social media to podcasting.

Han has focused this passion for audio into helping companies amplify their voice and he previously hosted a podcast called, “Your Biz Rocks” which breaks down the elements of a successful business.

“Podcasting, if you look at it like a marketing perspective, has got to be easily one of the most powerful forms of marketing out there because it’s very intimate,” Han said.

“Very rarely does anyone listen to something in stereo, other than their own voice...And it’s the only form of marketing that is the most subjective because you basically are submitting yourself to it, or holding yourself to it all day while you’re doing other things.”

Han described the contrast of his upbringing in working class, immigrant communities to living in an upper class, mostly white area in Orange County and how that shaped his worldview as a person.

“I learned a lot about entrepreneurship from both sets of parents,” Han said. “There’s no way I’d be as successful as I am right now if I didn’t have my white parents, because they just taught me some things about you know I think sociologists call it a ‘hidden curricul- um.’ It’s not taught in school, you know, and you can get an MBA and still not learn most of this.”

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**Philippine School of the Filipino School**

**FOUNDED:** 2015
**CEO:** Tony Qiao
**BUSINESS:** Nonprofit
**HEADQUARTERS:** Miramar
**TEAM:** 17
**WEBSITE:** www.thefilipinoschool.com
**CONTACT:** bennett.peji@gmail.com

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**Trifecta New Media Group**

**FOUNDED:** 2021
**CO-FOUNDERS:** Joon S. Han, Andre K. Kwan and Bernard Mauria
**HEADQUARTERS:** San Diego
**MISSION:** Media development and advisory agency focused on serving the unique, holistic and exacting standards of prestige and legacy brands.
**EMPLOYEES:** 3
**NOTABLE:** Han is the author of a book called “Get Ahead by Giving Back; Hacking Business Success With Generosity” and has been a TEDxSanDiego speaker.
**CONTACT:** media@trifectanewmedia.com
Founder Shares Family’s Herbal Formulas

MANUFACTURING: JBK Wellness Labs Formulates Products for Other Brands

JBK Wellness Labs is rooted in family tradition.

Founded by Dr. Jenelle Kim and husband Craig Nandoo, JBK Wellness Labs is a formulator and manufacturer contracted by high-end luxury topical, beauty and dietary supplements companies to create products for them. It’s formulas consist of traditional East Asian herbs and medicines that have been passed down from generation to generation within her Korean family, she said.

These days, JBK Wellness Labs are carried in high-end retail and mainstream locations like Nordstrom, Urban Outfitters, Whole Foods, Walmart, Target, Bergdorf Goodman, the Ritz Carlton, the Four Seasons and Mandarin Oriental, among others. The company’s revenue was between $8 million and $12 million in 2018, between $10 million and $15 million in 2019, and is projected to grow roughly 20% in 2021, according to the company.

“...I come from a long lineage of herbalists and doctors and studied tradition...”

Bi Bong Formulas

Kim is the holder of what is known as Bi Bong formulas, or secret formulas. A Bi Bong formula represents the “pinnacle in herbal formulation,” she said, meaning, when formulas are properly balanced between their components, it is possible to create properties that are not evident in the individual herbs themselves.

“...many herbalists have spent lifetimes seeking the right methods of preparation, ratios and results, which is why Bi Bong formulas are truly rare,” reads the website. “When this perfect balance of synergy is brought to a formula, it becomes transformative in its power.”

Because she knew she wanted to share these formulas with the world, Kim consulted with her family who gave her their blessings.

75 High-End Brands

Today, JBK Wellness Labs works with about 75 high-end brands, formulating and manufacturing roughly five products for each, said Nandoo. In terms of formulas, the company has a couple hundred variations, he said, adding that customers can place orders for between 5,000 and 10,000 SKUs depending on the product.

“We are constantly developing new products,” said Nandoo. “Pre-pandemic, our growth was 800% year-over-year. I think we will reach those numbers again very soon.”

The Start

After being asked by others in the skincare industry how they could also get natural herbal formulations in their product line, King and Nandoo launched the JBK Wellness Labs in 2012. Kim, formerly the primary formulator for a skincare company, and Nandoo, then the chief operating officer for a company in the spa industry, decided to leave their corporate jobs and use their backdrops and expertise to manufacture products for other brands.

JBK Wellness sources its ingredients from all over the world, as long as it is the highest quality ingredient, said Kim. The self-funded brand, with 17 employees locally, manufacturers, packages and distributes from its Miramar lab. It has two other offices, in Orange County and in Portugal.

Yi Chao’s Journey Started With a $500 Loan

TECH: Seatrec at Forefront of Area Blue Technology Cluster

“...I remember when I landed at JFK andcause work was hard to find back home for...”

Chao’s late father was an electrical engineer. His mother is an accountant. She and Chao’s two sisters still live in China. One is a teacher at a community college and the other is a physician.

Taking a risk

Since as long as he can remember, Chao said he wanted to be a scientist.

Before forming Seatrec, Chao held a variety of positions at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology, was the principal scientist at Remote Sensing Solutions, Inc. and is an adjunct professor at UCLA.

He worked on a program to develop satellites that studied the oceans from space. “After that, I got involved in underwater robots,” Chao said.

He formed Seatrec to commercialize the technology he developed at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Yi Chao’s Journey Started With a $500 Loan

“...Before coming to the U.S., Chao earned a bachelor’s degree in atmospheric physics from the University of Science and Technology of China...”

Before coming to the U.S., Chao earned a bachelor’s degree in atmospheric physics from the University of Science and Technology of China.

It was there that he met his wife, Yuan, who is a professor at the University California San Diego Medical School doing research in cancer treatment and drug discovery.

They both came from the same hometown, Shenyang, a city of about 7 million in northeastern China, but never met until college.

“...I remember when I landed at JFK andcause work was hard to find back home for...”

He formed Seatrec to commercialize the technology he developed at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.
Wake Up, Make Ramen, Repeat

RESTAURANTS: Takashi Endo Goes to Great Lengths to Make Fresh Ramen at Menya Ultra

Every morning, Takashi Endo starts his day no later than 4 a.m. to make homemade ramen noodles. Sometimes he gets to the kitchen at 2 a.m., if it is a busy day and sometimes one of his four sons wakes up early to help him make the noodles. However, the owner of Japanese ramen house, Menya Ultra, always insists on making his noodles from scratch daily.

“His kitchen is next door to a fitness center and it opens about the same time at 4 a.m., so they open together,” said Endo’s spokeswoman, Yoyo Sasaki, who translated from Japanese for him and runs the restaurant’s marketing.

Endo’s attention to detail translates to the bowl and has garnered national recognition — he has won the Tokyo Ramen Festival, the largest ramen event in the world, four years in a row.

He uses a special blend of three flours imported from the Hokkaido region of Japan, a northern island known for its wheat and spent time studying with the wheat farmers on how to make the best noodles. This blend gives Menya Ultra’s hand pulled noodles — which contain no preservatives, no GMOs or artificial colors — a distinctive sweet wheat scent, springy and smooth texture that will surprise you, Sasaki said.

Mastering Ramen Noodles

Growing up in Tohoku, Japan, Endo enjoyed cooking and the first dish he learned how to make was tempura around the age of 10. Later, like most 20-year-olds, he mastered the art of making pre-made ramen. Then, it was around this time that his brother returned to their hometown after working at a ramen store in Japan and he taught Endo how to make homemade ramen noodles.

In 1994, he opened his first ramen restaurant called Nishiki in Odate, Akita, Japan and today, he owns eight restaurants in Japan, four in Tawain and three in the United States — all in San Diego County.

He came to San Diego to visit a friend and ended up staying because he liked it here and he didn’t find authentic ramen like the kind he made in Japan, said Sasaki.

In 2017, he opened his first Menya Ultra in Clairemont and since then, his stores have had a line out the door. The Japanese word “menya” translates to “noodles” and although there is no word for “ultra” in Japanese, Endo added it to the name because it means better than super, and he wants to be the “ultra noodle house” Sasaki said.

One of the most popular dishes is the classic tonkatsu ramen which features a house made recipe of pork broth, and topped with a slice of pork chashu, bean sprouts, green onion, wood ear mushroom, roasted sesame seeds and a soft-boiled egg.

Adjusting for the Future

In March, Menya Ultra opened its third location in Hillcrest, and although the past year has presented Endo with challenges, he’s made adjustments to maintain his standard of quality.

Prior to the pandemic, Sasaki said that Endo traveled about 80 times annually for the past five years so he could check in on all of his restaurants and ensure the quality of the ramen was being kept up. He would spend three weeks in San Diego, fly to Japan for two weeks, then to Taiwan for two weeks and repeat the cycle again.

Menya Ultra now offers takeout, delivery and at-home ramen kits, all of which did not exist before the pandemic.

Sandwich Shop a Crossroads of Cultures Since 1974

RESTAURANTS: Garlic Rolls and Sourdough Bread Meet Southeast Asian Influences

By BRAD GRAVES

Framed by an aluminum door frame, Angela Lopez serves customers from a table blocking the doorway of Sandwich Emporium in Bay Park. From the back of the shop comes the smell of bacon.

The shop’s homey interior is lined with imitation brick and wood paneling. A high shelf on one wall holds artiques and knickknacks — an old time supermarket scale, several signs — but no one can enjoy the interior while COVID is still a concern in the wider community. Chairs are stacked up.

“I feel like I’m waking up from a weird dream,” said Lopez, who owns the business with her husband Peter Le and his twin brother John Le.

Not long ago, Sandwich Emporium generated about million dollars in revenue, but then COVID came along. The three business partners let leases to other spaces expire in 2020, and reduced the business to one location in a two-story shopping center on Clairemont Drive. Once COVID is over, the three will consider expansion.

Sandwich Emporium was founded in 1974 and has been owned by a succession of people with strong ties to other countries.

Lopez is originally from the Philippines. Peter and John Le were born at Sharp Hospital one year after their family departed Vietnam in a boat.

Childrenhood Memories

The brothers once lived three miles apart. Peter Le recalled his first turkey sandwich at Sandwich Emporium, and what a contrast it was to his mother’s Vietnamese cooking. The dinner table was always the place his family — including the twins and their eight siblings — bonded.

Peter Le said. He described his mother as someone who “loves to make people feel happy through food.”

They attended local schools, including University City High School. Peter Le went to study at Cal State Northridge while John went to San Francisco State. Lopez, for her part, lived in New York and Los Angeles and studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

When the brothers opened the sandwich shop, they knew from childhood was for sale. At the time, Peter Le and Lopez were living in the Los Angeles area, rescuing designer clothes and overstock fashion items on eBay. The online sales space, however, was growing more crowded.

Meanwhile, John Le was laid off from a San Diego job. That, however, turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

The brothers jumped at the chance to buy the shop, helped with financing from their family. “I rediscovered the place,” Peter Le said. Today it feels like home.

The Saigon Grinder

It’s an extensive menu at Sandwich Emporium. Food mixes the tastes of East and West. The most popular sandwiches include the Saigon grinder, a mash-up of American and Vietnamese tastes, with roast turkey, cucumbers, house Asian cole slaw (which is vinegar-based rather than cream based), house pickled jalapeños, cilantro and mayonnaise on a garlic roll.

A “Pho-wich” is inspired by the Vietnamese soup of the same name, with roast beef, basil, tomato, onion, cucumbers, pickled jalapeños and hoisin mayonnaise on a buttered garlic roll.

Other popular items include the California, the Cali melt with avocado, the bacon clubhouse melt and the Southwestern chipotle.

Catering has helped carry the business along. However, orders from tech businesses in Sorrento Valley turned out when offices closed. In recent months, the business has provided meals for hospital staff. Online sales have turned into an important channel for the business.

Sandwich Emporium supports the Asian Business Association of San Diego and does its best to help out the wider Asian community, Peter Le said.

Happily, the business was able to stay open all through the COVID emergency. “The community has been amazing. We are grateful,” said Lopez.
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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