Dr. Allen Chan Serves the Community

**RESTAURANTS:** Jasmine Seafood Restaurant Founder Feeds and Fundraises

Dr. Allen Chan opened Jasmine Seafood Restaurant in 1994, the initial drive for the then practicing chiropractor was simply his longtime desire to one day own and operate a food place. That’s why when the owner of San Diego’s first Dim Sum restaurant approached him about joining forces to open a new Dim Sum eatery in a 12,000 square foot space that had become available in Kearny Mesa, he jumped at the opportunity. Today, Jasmine Seafood Restaurant is tout-ed as one of the oldest Asian restaurants in San Diego and one of the few authentic Chinese Dim Sum food places in town.

Pre-pandemic, Jasmine Seafood Restaurant’s revenue was between $4 million and $5 million, according to Dr. Chan, and employee count was at 50. These days, because of multiple closures and limited capacity mandates as a result of COVID-19, the restaurant is making just over 50% of typical sales, he said, and employs 25.

**Chinese Dining Experience**

“We went to New York to hire chefs and our management team – at the time, NYC had the biggest Asian concentration area and best Chinese restaurants in the country and Kearny Mesa was not the Asian hub it is today,” said Chan, who attended University of Utah College of Pharmacy before attending University of Utah College of Chiropractic. He opened his own chiropractic office in San Diego in 1988.

“My goal was to introduce this Hong Kong style, Chinese dining experience to mainstream America.” But for Dr. Chan, Jasmine Seafood Restaurant morphed into more than just a place to feed people.

Generations of families have come together at Jasmine Seafood Restaurant through the decades for all kinds of occasions, said Cindy Chan, daughter of Dr. Chan, including birthdays, family reunions, weddings and anniversaries. Jasmine Seafood Restaurant has also often been the venue of choice for businesses to conduct lunches and fundraises because of the versatility of the space and audio-visual compatibility, she said.

“We can talk about how our award-winning chefs make some of the best dim sum and Cantonese seafood in the world, but Jasmine Seafood Restaurant isn’t just a food establishment,” she said. “It’s an essential and iconic cultural center -- a place where traditions are preserved and new memories are made with family and friends over expertly crafted delicacies and tea.”

**Tracing His Roots and Moving People**

**MANUFACTURING:** Apparel Maker Finds Himself in a Position to Help

**JEEPNEY 2.0**

For Tony Olaes, reconnecting with his family’s home country was a pivotal and life-changing experience.

“I grew up American. All I know is this county,” he said on a recent Friday. “I’ve only been Filipino 15 years.”

He had been to the Philippines before. It’s where his family came from. He didn’t really like it. During a trip in late 2005, however, Olaes found a new sense of identity.

He also felt a tug of responsibility. After all, as a successful businessman, he was in a position to make things better in the Pacific island country that only emerged from colonial rule in 1946.

Following his trip, Olaes got involved in several initiatives meant to benefit Pacific islanders.

For those in San Diego, he co-founded The Filipino School. The institution in Carmel Valley seeks to connect Filipinos to a heritage they may not know fully.

For those still in the Philippines, he has embarked on a transportation project that he is hoping to scale.
Designing a Different Path

ARCHITECTURE: Naveen Waney Was Always Interested in ‘How the Pieces Fit Together’

Naveen Waney’s parents expected him to go into the garment business. That’s what his father did in India before moving first to Belgium and then to the United States when the family moved first to Houston then to San Diego.

Instead, Waney became an architect, starting as a “go-fer” and rising to become a principal of Platt/Whitelaw Architects. Something just didn’t sit right with me. I didn’t want to get into the garment business,” Waney said. “Everyone wants to do something different from what their parents do.”

Waney developed a sense of independence early on, staying behind in a boarding school in India as a 7 and 9-year-old child for two years when his parents moved to Belgium in 1972 to get better care for Waney’s younger sister, who had developmental disabilities.

“In some ways, I think it helped me develop as a person. I feel like it gave me the mental disabilities. I have a different brain wiring than what he would expect,” Waney’s younger sister, who had hemorrhage and in 2010 died in 2010 and an older sister died of cancer in 2020. His father died in 2010 and an older sister died of cancer in 2020.

He graduated from the New School of Architecture in 1992. He was also a class valedictorian and went to work as an intern under the mentorship of Lee Platt and later Alison Whitelaw.

The firm became Platt/Whitelaw Architects in 1992 after Alison Whitelaw bought the firm. Waney and Sandra Gramley bought the firm in 1999.

Fitting things together

Waney traces his affinity for design to working while still in school as a summer intern for a contracting firm.

“I got really interested in how things come together, how pieces fit together,” Waney said. “It kind of influenced me to pick up a drafting program at Mesa College and winning that competition made me think I was good at it.”

Local Performing Artist Builds a Beacon of Hope

Anjanette Maraya-Ramey said she “escaped death twice” and the pandemic was yet another test of survival for her new business. The founder and artistic director of Maraya Performing Arts had survived a brain hemorrhage and in 2018 while undergoing chemotherapy treatments for leukemia, she envisioned a future business that became a beacon of hope.

“I would sit in my chemo chair and I was writing my business plan and doing vision boards and doing financial projections and looking at spaces, because you’ll just sit there for hours and I thought, instead of being depressed, let me dream of what my life will look like and feel like once I get through this,” Maraya-Ramey said.

In January 2020, her business plan for a performing arts center that is dedicated to educating allies about communities of color through performing arts was underway.

Maraya-Ramey’s parents immigrated to San Diego from the Philippines and her father served in the Navy. As a kid, Maraya-Ramey didn’t dream of becoming a professional dancer. In fact, she didn’t realize that was a viable career until she attended Southwestern College and “accidentally” found dance.

Maraya-Ramey walked by a jazz class one day and even though she hadn’t danced since she was 10 years old, she tried a few classes which led her to transfer to Grossmont College and switch her major to dance.

She left San Diego briefly to attend California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles where she earned her BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography.

Connecting Art and Business

After college, she danced in a company and returned to San Diego to be close to family and served as company manager at La Jolla Playhouse. Along the way Maraya-Ramey knew she wanted to expand her knowledge beyond dance and earned her Master’s degree in Nonprofit Leadership and Management from the University of San Diego. Now, she uses her expertise to train other artists in entrepreneurship.

While starting her own business hasn’t been easy from securing funding to pandemic restrictions, Maraya-Ramey has been determined to create a place that doesn’t just survive, but thrives and serves her community by teaching and mentoring artists.

“I do everything, I’ve never had cancer before,” Maraya-Ramey said. “And that’s the way I want to live the rest of my life, is knowing that anything is possible. If you put your mind, your heart and your soul into it — it will survive. I’ve experienced that many times before and I’m just now accustomed to just fighting through painful experiences and coming out on the other side of things.”
Growing Strawberries and a Family Business with Each Generation

AGRICULTURE: Carlsbad’s Jimmy Ukegawa Reinvents His Farm Business

By NATALLIE ROCHA

Jimmy Ukegawa jokes that he’s a farmer turned gardener — what was once a couple thousand acres of farmland off Cano on Road has shrunk to a 25-acre family business. The familiar stretch of green along the I-5 freeway may be smaller in size but to the residents of Carlsbad has only grown in impact.

The owner of the Carlsbad Strawberry Company, known for its U-Pick attraction that allows people to harvest their own fresh fruit, said business has quadrupled during the pandemic. The stand, located off Canon Road, had to expand from one window to five to keep up with demand.

With this in mind, Ukegawa has leveraged this boon to help other local businesses sell products at their stand. Additionally, Ukegawa started selling produce boxes through his other business, Aviara Parkway Farms Inc. and has donated more than half a million tons of fresh fruit and vegetables to community organizations.

Giving back to the community is at the center of this family-run business and this tradition has guided the Ukegawa family into the next generation of the business through agitourism.

Family Grown Business

In 1941, the Ukegawa’s lost all of their farmland in Orange County after being placed in a Japanese internment camp. In spite of this, Ukegawa’s father, Hiroshi Ukegawa, still enlisted with the U.S. military a year later to serve in World War II.

Soon after returning from the war, Hiroshi Ukegawa and his family moved to North County which is where they started the Carlsbad Strawberry Company in 1952, where they grew tomatoes, strawberries and mixed vegetables on about 2,000 acres of land.

Years later, after Jimmy Ukegawa earned his degree in plant and soil biology from UC Berkeley, he put his plans for graduate school on hold and returned to help run the family farm in the late 1980s.

At a time when the farm was struggling, Jimmy Ukegawa had the idea of pivoting to agitourism and starting the U-Pick attraction.

Now his daughter, Robyn Ukegawa, who is a driving force behind the company’s branding, social media and t-shirt designs, has chosen to join the family business and put her business degree to work. She also helps manage the warehouse operations at Aviara Parkway Farms and over the years one of the biggest lessons she’s learned from her family’s business is perseverance.

“This family motto is ‘he’s instilled in all of us — never give up no matter how hard it gets, because I know when I was a kid there were so many times where he had to take all of his personal money and invest into the company... and so he’s a big reason why our family business is still in business because he never gave up and he kept pushing,’ Robyn Ukegawa said.

Giving Back

Another family tradition is giving back to the community, something Jimmy Ukegawa said his parents have done from the beginning. For instance, every year, the Carlsbad Strawberry Company delivers a car full of produce to the Carlsbad Fire Department.

The Ukegawa family started the Carlsbad Strawberry Company in 1952 and is known for its U-Pick attraction where people can harvest their own strawberries.

Robyn Ukegawa also owns Aviara Parkway Farms Inc. which started selling variety boxes of local produce last year.

The desire to give back is also what inspired one of the newest features for Aviara Parkway Farms Inc. At the start of the pandemic, Ukegawa delivered boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables to elderly neighbors who were socially isolating. This resulted in people asking to buy these boxes and now they are selling hundreds of boxes per week as well as donating many to food insecure San Diegans, Ukegawa said.

While the past year has kept people made by a veteran in Escondido and Hollandia Dairy products from San Marcos. “As much as we could do to help this community stay in business is what we did and we’re proud of that and it will come back,” Ukegawa said.

Traditions

While the Ukegawa family keeps up the roots of the farm, they have also breathed new life into the attraction by adding a sunflower patch, bounce-house play area, a pumpkin patch in the fall and even an apple cannon aimed at wooden targets with COVID and a big red slash written on it.

“The primary breed grown at the strawberry fields are called Albion, which he said take a bit longer to grow and don’t produce as much as the kind grown commercially. That being said, their strawberries are noticeably sweeter in taste, a deeper ruby red and sometimes double the size of store-bought varieties.

“We’re always looking at what’s next...I’m constantly out their watching, seeing what they’re doing, seeing what they like, what they don’t like, and planning something new. That’s the thing we’re gonna do,” Jimmy Ukegawa said. “Just like a grower you have to think what crops are you going to produce next. In farming, in a lot of things, you’re always trying to learn something new.”