

Dr. Allen Chan Serves the Community

RESTAURANTS: Jasmine Seafood Restaurant Founder Feeds and Fundraises

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

When 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 touted 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 **Fresno State University** and then the **University of Utah College of Pharmacy** before attending **Los Angeles College of Chiropractic**. He opened his own chiropractic office in San Diego in 1988.

"My goal was to introduce this Hong



Photo Courtesy of Jasmine Seafood Restaurant

Jasmine Seafood Restaurant, founded in 1994, is not only a beloved local food place but also a venue where families host events and charities fundraise.

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."



Dr. Allen Chan
Founder/CEO
Jasmine Seafood
Restaurant

Many Charity Fundraisers

Since Dr. Chan took over Jasmine Seafood Restaurant in 1998 (he was originally a silent partner until his business partner passed), the location has hosted many charity fundraisers, including some to aid those affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the 9/11 attacks, among others.

Locally, Jasmine Seafood Restaurant has helped the **Rady Children's Hospital** raise money to purchase equipment and **Monarch School**, a foundation with a mission to educate students impacted by homelessness. Dr. Chan is also the founder and charter president of the **San Diego United Lions Club**, an organization that aims to serve the community.

To date, Jasmine Seafood Restaurant has raised and donated over half a million dollars, he said, through the support of the community. ■

Jasmine Seafood Restaurant



FOUNDED: 1994
OWNER/FOUNDER/CEO: Dr. Allen Chan
HEADQUARTERS: Kearny Mesa
BUSINESS: Local authentic dim sum restaurant and events venue.
REVENUE: Between \$4M and \$5M pre-pandemic
EMPLOYEES: 50 pre-pandemic, 25 now
WEBSITE: www.jasmineseafood.com
NOTABLE: Dr. Chan is also founder and charter president of the San Diego United Lions Club.
CONTACT: 858-268-0888

Tracing His Roots and Moving People

MANUFACTURING: Apparel Maker Finds Himself in a Position to Help

■ By BRAD GRAVES

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.



Tony Olaes
CEO
ODM



Photo courtesy of GET

Global Electric Transport Worldwide operates several COMET minibuses in the Philippines. Poway T-shirt maker Tony Olaes is a driving force behind the service.

Slogans and Shirts

For a large part of his career, Olaes has focused on T-shirts.

He recalled an early business lesson as a student at **San Diego State University**. It was the eve of a big football game. Just outside the classroom door, people associated with the team were selling T-shirts that made a derogatory pun out of the name of that week's opponent. Students snapped up the T-shirts. Olaes was amazed. "Look at this," he recalled

saying to himself. "Look at this market."

That eventually led to a full-time business which is about to finish its third decade. **ODM** in Poway sells millions of shirts annually through **Walmart**, **Target** and other retailers. Production is in Mexico. **Dun & Bradstreet** estimated that ODM made \$23.5 million in 2006. Olaes declined to give his current revenue but said it was higher than that.

He has since parlayed funds from his shirt business into other ventures.

Jeepney 2.0

Olaes' passion project these days is based in Del Mar. **Global Electric Transport Worldwide Inc.** has three employees in Del Mar and 38 in the Philippines, plus contractors. The venture, also known as GET, puts clean electric buses into service in countries that don't have much in the way of infrastructure.

The COMET 30-passenger minibus is built in China. GET operates limited numbers in three cities – Manila, Davao and Cebu – and plans to scale from there. Service is planned for Malaysia and Kenya before the year is over. Olaes is determined to make the venture as profitable as it is socially responsible. ■

ODM



FOUNDED: 1993
CEO: Tony Olaes
HEADQUARTERS: Poway
BUSINESS: Maker of apparel with licensed and original imagery
REVENUE: Between \$20M and \$30M
EMPLOYEES: 28
WEBSITE: www.odmart.com
NOTABLE: The business licenses imagery from various sources, including NASA and the estate of television personality Bob Ross
CONTACT: (858) 679-4450

Designing a Different Path

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

■ By RAY HUARD

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 leadership qualities, the strengths I rely on to run a business today,” Waney said.

He rejoined the family when they moved to Houston in 1976, where an uncle had a **Pier One Imports** franchise.

From Houston, the family moved to



Naveen Waney
Principal
Platt/Whitelaw
Architects



Photo courtesy of Pablo Mason

Fire Station 50 in UTC is among Naveen Waney’s favorite projects

San Diego, where Waney graduated from Madison High School, then went to **California State University Fullerton** on a soccer scholarship with no clear idea on a future career.

“Really, all I wanted to do was play soccer. I didn’t focus on studies,” Waney said.

A knee injury ended his soccer career, and Waney returned to San Diego to take classes at **Mesa College** to figure out what he wanted to do with his life.

At Mesa, he won first place in the San Diego Lumberman Design Competition that came with a scholarship to the **New School of Architecture and Design**.

“I took my money and I said, ‘OK, I’m going to the New School of Architecture’ because I really started getting into it (architecture),” Waney said.

A Guiding Principal

His mother died in a tragic accident in Del Mar in 1990.

“She was crossing train tracks and fell and hit her head and was run over by a train,” Waney said. “That set me back.”

From tragedy, Waney said he developed a guiding principle in all that he has done since, a sense that life is precious and short

and a sense of determination. His father died in 2010 and an older sister died of cancer in 2020.

He graduated from the New School of Architecture in 1992 as 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 2019.

Fitting things together

Waney traces his affinity for design to working while still in school as framer 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.” ■

Platt/Whitelaw Architects



FOUNDED: 1955

PRINCIPALS: Naveen Waney and Sandra Gramley

HEADQUARTERS: North Park

BUSINESS: Architects

REVENUE: \$5.5 million annually

NOTABLE: The firm specializes in public design projects such as schools, recreation centers, water and sewage treatment plants and has designed churches and temples of various religions and denominations

WEBSITE: www.plattwhitelaw.com

CONTACT: pwa@plattwhitelaw.com

Local Performing Artist Builds a Beacon of Hope

ARTS: Anjanette Maraya-Ramey Combines Art and Business Experience to Inspire Others

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

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 diverse, welcoming performing arts studio came to life. On March 1, 2020 she signed a five-year lease for the studio space in Chula Vista — then everything shut down.

She invested most of her life savings into this dream and when there was a chance her business might not survive the pandemic,



Anjanette Maraya-Ramey
Founder, CEO, Artistic
Director
Maraya Performing
Arts



Photo Courtesy of Anjanette Maraya-Ramey, Photo by Beto Soto

This past February, Anjanette Maraya-Ramey had a grand re-opening ceremony at the Chula Vista studio.

Maraya-Ramey figured she’s beaten near-death experiences before.

Hometown Business

Maraya-Ramey chose to open her business in Chula Vista, the community she grew up in, because there were not any creative spaces that centered diversity, equity and inclusion across the county like she envisioned for her business.

Her 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 like, 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.” ■

Maraya Performing Arts



FOUNDED: 2020

FOUNDER: Anjanette Maraya-Ramey

LOCATION: Chula Vista

BUSINESS: Performing arts center that is dedicated to celebrating the stories of diverse artists and educating allies about communities of color through the performing arts.

EMPLOYEES: 6

NOTABLE: Maraya Performing Arts was commissioned by La Jolla Playhouse to create a site-specific dance theatre film project for their Digital WOW Festival.

CONTACT: Facebook - @Maraya Performing Arts

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 Canon 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.



Jimmy Ukegawa
Owner
Carlsbad Strawberry Company

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 agritourism.

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 Berkley, 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 agritourism 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.

"The family motto 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 invested 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.



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. Photo Courtesy of Carlsbad Strawberry Company

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**

coming back to the strawberry fields, for some socially-distanced fun, Ukegawa also used the opportunity to become a hub for local businesses who were struggling. The strawberry stand and Aviara warehouse sell **Bitch'n Sauce** from Vista, **El Nopali-to** chips from Encinitas, strawberry jelly

machine for the business because the phones were ringing off the hook the past few months.

This slow and steady, traditional approach even transfers into what makes their strawberries stand out among the kind you purchase from the grocery store.

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 there watching, seeing what they're doing, seeing what they like, what they don't like, and planning the next 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, as in a lot of things, you're always trying to learn something new." ■



Jimmy Ukegawa also owns Aviara Parkway Farms Inc. which started selling variety boxes of local produce last year. Photo Courtesy of Carlsbad Strawberry Company

Department.

The tradition started when Ukegawa's sister was sick as a child and the fire department heroically revived her at their house. His mother, **Miwako Ukegawa**, made a point to deliver strawberries to the fire station as a thank you and since then, the family has continued the tradition every 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.

Robyn Ukegawa said the business has changed from generation to generation, but her dad still believes in doing some things the old-fashioned way. In fact, he finally caved and got an automated answering



Robyn Ukegawa
Social Media &
Marketing Manager
Carlsbad Strawberry Company

Carlsbad Strawberry Company



FOUNDED: 1952

OWNER: Jimmy Ukegawa

LOCATION: Carlsbad

BUSINESS: Family-owned farm where people can pick their own strawberries. Aviara Parkway Farms also delivers local produce in subscription boxes.

EMPLOYEES: 60 seasonal

WEBSITE: www.carlsbadstrawberrycompany.com

NOTABLE: Since last March, Jimmy, his staff, and partners have donated more than 500,000 pounds of food to combat food insecurity and was named May Constituent of the Month by U.S. Representative Mike Levin (D-CA).

CONTACT: info@carlsbadstrawberrycompany.com