

Lily Quan Found Her Niche

REAL ESTATE: Opened Carlsbad's Q-Homes in 2019

■ By RAY HUARD

Lily Quan wanted to be a doctor, worked as a flight attendant for American Airlines and in 2019 opened **Q Homes** in Carlsbad real estate agency with her husband.

Along the way, Quan lived in Chile, Taiwan and Hong Kong where she taught English to Chinese businessmen, worked in her father's restaurant in Idyllwild, and moved to San Diego as a teenager to live for a time with an older sister when her father moved back to China.

Born in Los Angeles and raised by a single-father, Quan is the youngest of three girls. She got a taste of the real estate business when her father remodeled and flipped homes in Seattle before moving the family to California.

He opened a restaurant in Idyllwild - **Panda Village** - after a friend told him that the community didn't have a single Chinese restaurant.

"My dad took one trip up to Idyllwild and fell in love," Quan said. "The town opened up its arms to us. We were the typical Chinese family in a whole white



Lily Quan
CEO
Q Homes



Lily Quan and her husband, Kingsley, own Q Homes real estate agency in Carlsbad.

Photo courtesy of Lily Quan

neighborhood. They really showed us what it was like to be kind and they supported our business. Those years impressed upon me that it doesn't matter what color you are."

They made another impression as well. "I will never go into that business again," Quan said. "That was the hardest

we worked for the least amount of profit. You really commit to that for 12 hours a day, six days a week."

Traveling the World

Her father kept the restaurant for five years, then moved back to China to run a beveled glass business.

Quan stayed behind, moving into a Mira Mesa apartment with her sister, who was a student at **San Diego State University**.

Quan earned an associate degree from **Mesa College**, studying Mandarin. She also is fluent in Cantonese.

Earning a bachelor's degree from **California State University Long Beach**, majoring in kinesiology.

Quan and her husband, Kingsley, opened Q Homes just as the COVID pandemic was starting.

"I was stressing. I thought, 'Oh my God, there was no way,'" Quan said.

"We ended up thriving and had the craziest banner year that nobody could have predicted," Quan said. ■

Q Homes



FOUNDED : 2019

OWNERS: Lily and Kingsley Quan

HEADQUARTERS: Carlsbad, CA

BUSINESS: Real Estate Brokerage

SALES VOLUME: \$17M

EMPLOYEES: 2

NOTABLE: Lily is Single Engine Pilot that almost went to pilot training for the Air National Guard to fly C130J had the homebuilding industry not offered her a job.

WEBSITE: <https://linktr.ee/QHomesCarlsbad>

CONTACT: 619-328-7737

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Female Founder Finds Success in Hydration

TECH: Device Applications Include Sports, Medical

■ By FRED GRIER

Four years ago, **Debbie Chen** founded **Hydrostasis** to solve the problem around hydration monitoring. Chen has many roles in life including being a parent, founder, scientist and Muay Thai fighter.

She faced the personal struggle of hydrating properly for her sport, leading her to build a personalized real-time hydration monitoring system for athletes. The La Jolla-based company is one of the handful of Asian-founded technology start-ups in the region.



Debbie Chen
Founder and CEO
Hydrostasis



Photo courtesy of Hydrostasis

Hydrostasis makes a wearable sensor that can be used by athletes to track hydration levels.

“

"My entrepreneurial journey is filled with challenges from the startup tech world not being used to seeing an immigrant woman of color as a successful founder. Now that I have gotten my start, my wish is to continue to be visible and mentor the next generation of Asian women to start businesses, hold executive positions and sit on corporate boards. We can be successful business leaders and at the same time honor our culture of respect and humility."

DEBBIE CHEN

bodies and minds, Hydrostasis equips people with a unique performance edge, said Chen.

"There is an immediate need for real-time hydration monitoring. Data-driven technologies in sports performance, as well as risk-management and injury prevention, are very much front-of-mind in the sports sector," she said.

Helping Adults

Hydrostasis initially targeted collegiate sports teams to monitor athletes' hydration level, it has since pivoted to the older adult market due to the pandemic. Dehydration is one of the top reasons for ER visits for older adults, said Chen.

Earlier this year, it was granted a patent by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for its "tissue hydration monitor." In the last

decade, all-female invented patents constituted only about 4% of issued patents.

The company is running pilots to study at-risk populations including athletes, older adults, patients with chronic kidney disease and patients with chronic heart failure. It plans to enter the commercialization once their technology is clinically validated.

Advocating for Diversity

Chen has served as an entrepreneur in residence at **UC San Diego**, a scientist at **Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute**, and research scientist at **Scripps Institute of Oceanography**. She also advocates for underrepresented company founders and women leaders.

Chen said accelerator programs such as the **REC Innovation Lab** and **Connect All at the Jacobs Center**, are examples of programs with minority leaders, servicing under-represented founders. ■

Hydrostasis



FOUNDED: 2017

CEO: Debbie Chen

BUSINESS: Builds solutions for hydration monitoring

HEADQUARTERS: La Jolla

EMPLOYEES: 5

WEBSITE: www.hydrostasis.com

NOTABLE: Chen is served as an entrepreneur-in-residence at UC San Diego.

CONTACT: info@hydrostasis.com

Junya Watanabe Learns the Tricks of the Trade

Founder of The RakiRaki Ramen and The Yasai Adds His Own Spin on Japanese Recipes

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

Before opening the first **The RakiRaki Ramen** restaurant in Kearny Mesa in 2011, **Junya Watanabe** was a fashion designer.

From 1984 through 2000, Watanabe co-owned **Tadashi Shoji**, a Los-Angeles-based evening wear fashion company.

When he retired shortly after and while living in New York City, he discovered his love for ramen. That's when his second career, this time in the food industry, began.

Multi-Concept Space

In 2011, Watanabe, born in Japan and who studied economics at **UCLA**, opened the first The RakiRaki Ramen shop on Convoy Street. Today, there are four The RakiRaki locations: Convoy, Liberty Station, Mira Mesa and San Francisco. In 2017, after going vegan, Watanabe launched **The Yasai**, a plant-based Japanese food concept in Little Italy. A second location, also on Convoy, is currently being converted to a multi-concept space to be named **RakiRaki Commons**. That will include The Yasai, RakiRaki, **JCK** (which stands for Junya's Crispy Karaage), a new sushi and bento concept and a craft beverage bar.

Collectively, revenue from both The RakiRaki Ramen and The Yasai is close to \$7 million annually, said Watanabe. The businesses are expecting even more growth and expansion in 2021.



Junya Watanabe
Founder
The RakiRaki Ramen,
The Yasai, RakiRaki
Commons



Photo Courtesy of RakiRaki Commons

RakiRaki Commons will feature a Kaiseki bento box (pictured above) and sushi concept, as well as a Kaarage fried chicken restaurant called **JCK**, a RakiRaki Ramen, a The Yasai and a bar.

"I think we are going to do maybe 25% higher gross than pre-pandemic in 2021," said Watanabe. "I'm doing a new concept called RakiRaki Commons where the old The Yasai was. It will be five concepts under one roof – a one stop premium Japanese culinary experience."

Creativity, Persistence and Innovation

After being inspired by the booming ramen food scene in New York City in the 2000s, Watanabe spent the next seven years learning from the best ramen chefs in Japan.

Watanabe then took all of the tricks and trades he acquired and put his own spin on them. For example, Watanabe taught himself how to ferment broth and add mochi powder to his noodles to make them thicker than most.

To date, Watanabe says no other chef statewide has figured out how to do the same.

Reputation

Watanabe seems to always be two steps ahead.

When the first COVID-19 case emerged in China, Watanabe immediately began preparing his team for take-out and delivery in anticipation.

As a result, The RakiRaki Ramen made a profit during the pandemic, said

Watanabe, and The Yasai broke even by October.

For Watanabe, this has all been validating.

"I think I've established more of my reputation in the last year, during the pandemic," he said with a chuckle. ■

The RakiRaki Ramen



FOUNDED: 2011

FOUNDER: Junya Watanabe

HEADQUARTERS: Kearny Mesa

BUSINESS: Ramen restaurant

REVENUE: \$7M combined with The Yasai

EMPLOYEES: Over 250

WEBSITE: www.rakirakiramen.com

NOTABLE: Adds mochi powder to noodles

CONTACT: 858-771-7254

The Yasai



FOUNDED: 2017

FOUNDER: Junya Watanabe

HEADQUARTERS: Kearny Mesa

BUSINESS: Vegan sushi restaurant

REVENUE: \$7M combined with RakiRaki

EMPLOYEES: About 80

WEBSITE: www.theyasai.com

NOTABLE: Was inspired by the founder's own transition to veganism

CONTACT: 858-771-7254



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Wireless Firm's Founder Began His Journey in China

TECHNOLOGY: Yan Hui Fine-Tunes Networks, Sees Growth With Airhop

■ By BRAD GRAVES

As a boy, **Yan Hui** took a liking to radio. AM, FM and ham radio had a certain allure.

The fascination endured and it set a direction for Hui's studies. That, in turn, set him on the path that led to graduate study in the United States.

Early in his career, he came to one of California's wireless hot spots: San Diego. Today he is pushing the boundaries of radio communication. He founded and runs a software company called **Airhop Communications**, based in Old Town, which deals in advanced radio communications such as fourth-generation and fifth-generation (4G and 5G) wireless networks.

Hui's early studies in the world of the wireless spectrum took place in northern China. The CEO received his bachelor's degree from Tianjin University. Tianjin is a port city and the third largest urban area in China, behind Beijing (which is roughly 75 miles away) and Shanghai.

When it came time for graduate studies, Hui headed for the upper Midwest, enrolling at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He received a master of science degree in electrical engineering — as

well as the distinction of being a Badger and an interest in the Big Ten Conference.

Following college, he went to work for **Nortel Networks**. Shortly thereafter, he landed at a pioneering San Diego company called Dot Wireless. It was acquired by **Texas Instruments** in 2000 for \$475 million.

At TI, Hui established and managed research and development in third generation (3G) wireless technology. He led technical teams and collaborated with strategic partners to develop the industry's first systems known as 1xEV-DV. He also chaired the TI wireless system patent committee and led the company's 3G standards activities for a number of years.

He also got acquainted with leaders in San Diego's wireless scene. One of them, **John McDonough**, suggested he start his own company. When he did, McDonough became his first investor. Thus Airhop was born.

Growing a Company

Building a business in the wireless



Yan Hui
Founder and CEO
Airhop
Communications

space is not an overnight undertaking. It takes time and patience, Hui said. Since its founding in 2007, Airhop has grown to about 20 employees worldwide, with 15 in San Diego.

By now Airhop has more than 40 fundamental patents in its space. Another 10 are pending.

Airhop puts software to work in the service of wireless communications. The world of 4G and 5G communications is complex. Often such networks need human technicians to fine-tune them so that they perform at their peak. Airhop's software does the same thing, using artificial intelligence and machine learning.

At this point, Hui said, his company is in a phase of rapid growth. Over the next several years, he is looking to multiply revenue while achieving profitability. He declined to give revenue, other than to say it is more than \$1 million. The Zoominfo website estimates Airhop's revenue as \$4 million.

Hui is fortunate to have contracts with

two successful wireless carriers: **Rakuten Mobile** in Japan and **Jio** in India (also known as Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd.). Terms of the contracts preclude him from disclosing the value of the deals, Hui said.

Hui is also paying it forward. He has taken up angel investing, funding the business ventures of a new generation of electrical engineers.

After all, he isn't the only one who knows about a boyhood fascination with wireless. ■

Airhop Communications



FOUNDED: 2007

CEO: Yan Hui

HEADQUARTERS: Old Town

BUSINESS: Maker of software for wireless communications

EMPLOYEES: 15

WEBSITE: <https://airhopcomm-web.com/>

NOTABLE: The business counts Broadcom, Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd., Arcadyan and CloudScale Capital Partners as investors

CONTACT: (858) 547-3935

Creating Her Own Job and Community

RETAIL: Josephine Lee Makes Her Mark In the Dance World as a Pointe Shoe Fitter

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

For **Josephine Lee**, her first business was born out of tough times and her newest venture is no different. In 2014, she launched **The Pointe Shop**, a first-of-its kind business after graduating college amid the financial crisis.

As a seasoned pointe shoe fitter, it is her job to gauge the best, glove-like fit for ballet dancers and for the past decade she has traveled to ballet schools and professional companies across the country with her mobile business.

Pointe shoes cost about \$100 per pair and before the pandemic, Lee would do anywhere from 600 to 1,000 pointe shoe fittings per month. But when the pandemic slashed the sales of her family's dance retail storefront in San Diego and the lease was about to expire, rather than close the shop Lee thought up another idea to reimagine its purpose.

Inspired by the WeWork, co-working space business model, Lee has made **Danse Medica** a hub for dancers to be fitted for pointe shoes and treated by dance specialists, such as physical therapists and nutritionists, all in one place.

Entrepreneur Mindset

Lee began dancing at the age of 3 and growing up she always knew that she wanted to be in some dance-related field. Her dancing experience spans genres from Korean folk dancing to ballet as she spent her childhood in both the United States and Korea.

But it all started with her mom, **Grace Lee**, who founded **Dancer's Choice**, a dance supply shop in Orange County. For



Photo Courtesy of Josephine Lee, Photo by Amy Howton
Josephine Lee has been fitting pointe shoes for more than 17 years and since 2014 she has traveled across the country for fittings through her business, The Pointe Shop.



Josephine Lee
CEO
Danse Medica & The
Pointe Shop

her mom, starting the dance retail store in 2003 was a way for her to support her family and help pay for Josephine's passion for dance.

Josephine said that her lens for entrepreneurship was shaped by her mom and she spoke to how many first-generation Asian Americans often open small businesses such as liquor stores or nail salons because it was their best option for survival.

"Our version of what a small business is, is not this aspirational, kind of like business that we pursue because of our passions. A lot of Asian immigrants pursue business for survival purposes because no one will give them a job, and

they have to figure out a way to feed their families," Lee said.

In a similar way, Lee explained that starting her first business was a matter of necessity. After graduating from the University of Southern California in 2010, the economy hadn't rebounded from the financial crisis so Lee followed her mother's example and opened up a dance retail shop in Irvine.

"I kind of had the same feeling when I graduated from college — even though I had a degree and I am a second-generation Asian immigrant — that if there's no jobs for me, I have to make my own," Lee said.

Dance Specialists

She figured that she would work on the business for a couple of years, then return to plan A which was to pursue a career in

broadcast sports reporting. But what started as a brick-and-mortar shop, turned into her current mobile pointe shoe fitting business, **The Pointe Shop**.

Lee said it took time to educate people on the business model, but she has not spent a dollar on advertising because the dance world is small and her business has grown on word of mouth. That being said, **The Pointe Shop** has also gained attention through its social media platforms, such as its YouTube channel which boasts more than 13 million views.

The tightknit nature of the dance world is the foundation of **Danse Medica** which started in late 2019 as pop-up events and has grown into the Sorrento Valley storefront and an online community of dance specialists figuring out how to address issues across the industry.

Lee credits her mom for exemplifying how being a hands-on business owner can impact the community.

"She's very good at bringing community together...trying to figure out the best solution for every person that's involved," Lee said. "And that is the way I think about anything that I pursue — how can we get to a place where everyone is in a better position because we're pursuing this?" ■

DanseMedica, Inc. DanseMedica

FOUNDED: November 2019

OWNER: Josephine Lee

LOCATION: Sorrento Valley

BUSINESS: Co-Working Space for Dance Specialists

EMPLOYEES: 1

WEBSITE: DanseMedica.com

NOTABLE: In 2016, Josephine Lee surpassed 35,000 contestants from 142 countries to win 3rd place in the World Championship of Public Speaking.

CONTACT: Instagram - @josephineylee

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