

18 Years of Good Fortune - Hard work brings success to Tsai family restaurant

Written by BY PATTI SELLS, News-Telegram Feature Writer
Thursday, 02 April 2009 09:12



Moo shu pork, kung pao chicken, egg foo young, moo goo gai pan — the flavors of the Far East await customers beyond the embellished doors of China House Restaurant, located at 472 West Shannon Road.

Authentic Chinese cuisine is served every day except Monday, according to Jimmy Tsai, the middle son of Andy and Cathy Tsai. The couple brought their young family to America in 1983 from Taiwan, an island off the southeastern coast of China.

“It was a very exciting move,” said Cathy of their overseas relocation. “Family had come before. They like. So, we come. We like it, we stay, ’cause more better for kids — schools, opportunity.”

Jimmy said he and his older brother Jason have both gone on to careers outside of the family business — Jason in food sales, Jimmy real estate. Their younger brother Johnathon is in high school with plans to attend college.

According to Jimmy, he was in the second grade when his family moved to Hopkins County in 1991 to open China House. His parents had been part owners of a restaurant in Sherman and had worked hard, putting in long hours and saving their money to open their own establishment.

“It was very hard on them trying to raise kids and run a restaurant. We were always running around getting into trouble while they were trying to work,” said Jimmy, who fondly recalled the days when he and his brothers were growing up in the restaurant. “This is all we had ever known.”

The heavily adorned edifice on the south service road of Interstate 30 resembles that of the Taiwan Confucian Temple, complete with Foo (or Fu) Dogs, also known as guardian lions, as well as dragons that are said to be harbingers of good fortune, according to Chinese folklore.

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“The décor represents good luck and prosperity,” explained Jimmy.

The symbolism seemingly has worked as the Tsai family’s good fortune has continued for 18 years in Sulphur Springs, with the family serving their daily “super buffet” consisting of house specialties such as orange beef, fragrant scallops and Szechwan-style beef and chicken.

Appetizers include egg rolls, fried wonton, fried dumplings, crab Rangoon and cho cho, which consists of skewered strips of steak with a special sauce and served on a flaming hibachi.

The variety of exotic and flavorful main dishes includes sweet and sour pork, almond chicken, Mongolian beef and Hunan beef or shrimp, as well as beef, chicken, pork or seafood tossed with any number of ingredients — bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, green onions, cashews, snow peas, noodles — for endless variations.

“People seem to like the sweet and sour chicken or sesame chicken best,” said Jimmy, who has worked in all aspects of the business.

“We serve egg foo young, which is basically a Chinese version of an omelet; moo shu is a mixture of food rolled up in like a pancake,” said Jimmy, explaining some of the menu items. “Lo mein are noodles. Chow mein is vegetables served with fried noodles. Kung pao means it is really spicy, and moo goo gai pan is a white meat dish, very light, with vegetables.”

Also on the menu are egg drop soup, hot and sour soup and Wonton soup, either with your meal or to go.

Prices range from an egg roll for 95 cents to the combination plates of sliced chicken, shrimp and beef with Chinese vegetables served in a brown sauce on a sizzling hot plate for \$8.99. Lunch specials range from \$4.59 to \$5 and include egg roll, choice of soup, fried rice and fried chicken wing in addition to the entree, and is served from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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And there's always China House's Super Buffet, which is available for lunch and dinner. The price varies.

According to Jimmy, his family is very thankful to the people in the local community for allowing the Tsais to serve them successfully for the past 18 years.

"The restaurant business has been good to us here," he said. "We have put in lots of long hours and hard work, but we have a lot of good memories here, too."

China House is open Tuesdays through Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.