



Former House of Louie manager opens own restaurant in Covina

By Claudia S. Palma, Staff Writer

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Restaurant owner Benny Ng at his House of Benny chinese restaurant in Covina on Friday, March 8, 2011. Ng worked for more than 30 years at the House of Louie chinese restaurant in West Covina and decided to open his own last December. (Watchara Phomicinda / Staff Photographer)

When Benny Ng joined his older brother working part-time at a restaurant, he never imagined it would turn into his life's work.

The Hong Kong native began working at the House of Louie Chinese restaurant when he was just 18 years old. Part-time weekend work turned to full-time work, and after a few years, he became manager at the West Covina restaurant.

Now, at 49, Ng has opened his own restaurant - House of Benny in Covina.

"Some people say, 'Are you sure, with this economy?'," recalled Ng when he first thought of opening his own business. "I said, 'I feel confident. I've been doing this for a long time'."

Four years ago, the original House of Louie owners decided it was time to retire after more than 40

years in the business and the restaurant changed hands.

Even though Ng had some shares invested in the restaurant, he stayed on as manager with the new owners more because of the family he created with his fellow employees.

"Change was tough but I stayed because everybody been working there a long time," he said. "We are family."

Many employees were working at the restaurant for more than 15 years and there was a roster of regular patrons that also became family.

Last year, Ng returned from a regular vacation and knew he had to make a change.

"Every two years, I go to Hong Kong with my wife and daughter and visit family and go to surrounding cities," he said. "When I get back last July, a lot of

things changed (at the restaurant)."

Knowing the current economy was the reason,

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Ng still felt a big loss with several staff changes.

"That was it, so I decided to open my own restaurant," he said. "I wanted to open up a new restaurant to bring us (employees) all together again."

Ng felt confident in starting his business in this economy if he had a few good tools - a good location, a recognizable name and great loyal employees.

"(Friends and customers) would tell me about (different locations) and then someone told me about this location," he recalls. "I know this area so I came and took a look and ran into a few old customers (from House of Louie) eating at Fonda Don Chon restaurant (next door)."

House of Benny found a new home at Shoppers Lane in Covina and opened on Dec. 1 last year. Though the size is smaller than House of Louie, Ng is happy to start small.

"(The restaurant) is small, cozy and we have good service," he said. "Business is pretty good and I haven't done any advertising. (Employees) are so happy and my family has been very supportive."

Now as much as ever, Ng is happy to have a supportive family, customers and especially loyal and trustworthy employees.

Ng's wife was recently diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer and has begun chemotherapy treatments. While business is doing well, Ng is happy it is a small restaurant so he can take time to look after his wife and her needs during this time.

"I feel very good," he said. "I did not expect the overwhelming support. I feel warmth and compassion."

For Lisa Tong, 64, a waitress and hostess at House of Benny, it only made sense to follow Ng

on his new venture.

"For over 30 years, I've been working with Benny," she said. "I like working with Benny, he's a nice guy. I feel happy now. We have very good customers, very nice and area is very good."

For longtime customer Debbie Quon, she is happy to have a new



Restaurant owner Benny Ng, left, and waitress Alice Yue, at the House of Benny Chinese restaurant in Covina on Friday, March 8, 2011. Ng worked for more than 30 years at the House of Louie Chinese restaurant in West Covina and decided to open his own last December. (Watchara Phomicinda / Staff Photographer)

place to go enjoy her favorite Chinese food and admires Ng for opening his own restaurant.

"He was concerned for all the former employers

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and for us customers," she said. "We know all those workers, we know how great the service is."

Quon said she remembered the way the food and atmosphere at House of Louie was before the change of owners and how it was after the change.

"When you have new owners, you do cut back, you try to do what you can with less in this economy," she said. "There's a different feeling (now) at the House of Louie, especially for us old customers that have been going there for like 15 years. When a different owner comes in and makes little changes, it makes a difference."

Quon is one of many customers who have become friends with Ng and his staff over the years and are happy to discover his new restaurant.

"We all go where Benny is," she said. "The food is great, the friendliness. It's that original House of Louie feeling, the smile they give you when you come in. There's a personal touch in that."

Ng said he is happy to see the support of his old customers as they come in to House of Benny.

"Some customers I've known a long time," he said. "Now I serve their children, their grandchildren."

As far as future plans, Ng said his first priority is his wife right now.

"Then later, if I can do it, maybe No. 2 or No. 3 (restaurants), if it's a good location," he smiles.

House of Benny is at 624 Shoppers Lane, Covina, 626-331-9161.

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