

Lotus Leaf offers Thai cuisine in Eden Prairie

BY PATTY DEXTER
pdexter@swpub.com

Eden Prairie's George Zheng originally planned go to law school or business school after earning his economics degree from the University of Minnesota.

Instead, he ventured into the restaurant business — first taking over Chai's Thai Restaurant in Minneapolis in 2011. He later sold that business and most recently opened his own establishment, Lotus Leaf Thai Restaurant at 7922 Mitchell Road in Eden Prairie, on Oct. 1.

"I think that was probably the best decision I've ever made in my career," he said of becoming a restaurant owner. "I couldn't be happier that I'm in this business."

Lotus Leaf's website describes the business as a "contemporary Thai restaurant serving elegant cuisine in an unpretentious setting with a focus on natural and locally sourced ingredients." It offers a variety of Thai dishes including curries, stir fries, noodles and local craft beers, wines and house-made non-alcoholic beverages.

Zheng said first and foremost, he wants people to feel comfortable in his restaurant and has never aimed to have a fancy atmosphere.

"I feel like in many subtle ways that kind of takes away from the food if the ambiance is a little too swanky," he explained. "I consider this to be a low-key and unpretentious setting. I do that on purpose because I want the food to be the star of the show."

HIS OWN TWIST

Zheng, 27, grew up in Mankato and also spent time in Texas before relocating back to the Twin Cities. He said his interest in culinary arts started in college when he began cooking for himself. He also worked in the True Thai restaurant in Minneapolis' Seward neighborhood where he learned the skills of



PHOTO BY PATTY DEXTER

Lotus Leaf Thai Restaurant in Eden Prairie offers Thai cuisine including Pad Thai.

cooking Thai food.

"I worked alongside some of the best Thai chefs in the country. I think that was the moment I got immersed into Thai cooking and I've just been captivated by it ever since," he said.

He decided to come to Eden Prairie when he found a space that worked for his desire to open a 40- to 50-seat restaurant. This size allows him to focus on making everything in smaller batches, ensuring that his customers will get their food fresh and right off the stove, he said.

Zheng said fundamentally his food is authentic but at the same time, he believes food as a concept is always evolving.

"It's not static and it's not set in stone. It's really the people that cook the food that changes it," he said. "I like to stick to the basic core principles but at the same time, I like to put my own twist on it."

MENU

According to the restaurant's website, menu items range from \$5 to \$17.

Zheng said the menu offerings are quintessential Thai food. According to the website, there are "small plate" dishes like fresh spring rolls, steamed edamame, Thai beef

jerky with sticky rice, Thai fried eggs, and sriracha chicken wings. There's also green papaya salad (shredded green papaya with sweet green beans, roasted peanuts, crushed herbs and chili lime dressing) and tom yum soup (hot and sour aromatic soup with lemon grass, galangal, tomato, onions, mushrooms, cilantro, scallions and lime juice).

There are multiple curries to choose from. Panang curry is a smoky red coconut curry simmered with sweet Thai basil and red peppers. Spicy green curry is coconut curry simmered with sweet Thai basil, bell peppers, Chinese eggplant and bamboo shoots, according to the online menu.

The yellow curry is made with fresh ground spices and is simmered with onions and organic potatoes. There's also mahi mahi with green curry, which is a mahi mahi filet served with poached baby bok choy smoky rice noodles and a spicy green curry sauce.

The massaman curry is described as a southern Thai style curry stew with slow cooked braised beef brisket, roasted peanuts, onions and organic potatoes. Zheng said this dish isn't as well-known with his customers and he

would recommend it. He said one man enjoyed it so much he wanted to have a long discussion with him about it.

"I think it's got appeal. I think once you have the dish you can taste all the time and energy I put into it," he said.

There are multiple main entrees served with steamed jasmine rice — cashew chicken with roasted chili sauce, ginger beef, shrimp and chicken basil, "Kobe style" 12-ounce wagyu strip steak and garlic shrimp.

Lotus Leaf also offers several rice and noodle dishes including pad Thai (stir fried noodles with green onions bean sprouts that can be served with shrimp, chicken or tofu); pad kee mow with beef (smoky wide rice noodles with stir fried beef, onions, sweet basic, spicy Thai chili, garlic and tomato); pad see yew (chicken, wide rice noodle, garlic, eggs, broccoli, Chinese kale in a soy sauce); pineapple shrimp fried rice, chicken fried rice and spicy basil fried rice with beef, according to the restaurant's website.

Zheng believes his signature dish is pad Thai with shrimp because "it's a good reflection of the type of cuisine and the type of chef that I am." He added that pad Thai

said, "I believe that I am in accordance with the will of the almighty creator; by defending myself against the Jews, I am fighting for the Lord. I would like to thank providence and the almighty for choosing me of all people." "My God is better than your God."

The Second Sudanese Civil War, fought between 1983-2005. The conflict when the Muslim central government imposed sharia law on the Christian south. This war killed between 1-2 million people with 4 million displaced. "My God is better than your God."

Since 2001, the Afghanistan War has killed an estimated 585,000 people and in the Iraq War 450,000 people as a result of the conflict. President Bush called these wars,

"The War on Terrorism" but it is part of the ongoing war of Christians vs. Muslims. This war started against the Taliban has now turned into the war against ISIS (Islamic State) and has expanded into Syria and Yemen. "My God is better than your God."

There are smaller religious wars that could be included, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Northern Ireland, Yugoslav Wars, Rwanda genocide, India-Pakistan, Congo, Tibet, and civil war in Sudan. These are wars fought in the modern era, the list could go on and on. "My God is better than your God."

In the last thousand years about 40 million people have died in the name of religion.

"Religiously justified violence is first and

foremost a problem of 'sacred' text and not a problem of misinterpretation of texts" per Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. We hear "God Bless America," why not "God Bless This World." Is God on our side? Does God have a side or a religion? Gandhi said, "God has no religion." Maybe that's the place we need to start.

"Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky. Imagine all the people, living for today ...

Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too. Imagine all the people, Living life in peace ..."

- John Lennon "Imagine"
John E. Mallo is a resident of Eden Prairie.

Pad Thai with shrimp tempura

George Zheng, owner of Lotus Leaf Thai restaurant, shared the following recipe for readers:

Basic Sauce:

- 3 cups of water
- 1/4 cup of sugar
- 8 ounces of palm sugar
- 4 fluid ounces of tamarind juice
- 4 fluid ounces of vinegar
- fish sauce to taste
- 14 oz medium size dry rice stick noodles
- 4 medium organic eggs
- 1 pound of tail-on shrimp, peeled and deveined
- paprika
- fresh bean sprouts
- scallions
- lime
- crushed roasted peanuts
- vegetable oil
- fresh Thai chili peppers (optional)

Shrimp Tempura Batter:

- 1 small egg
- 1 cup of tempura flour
- 1/2 cup of chilled sparkling water

Directions:

To make the basic sauce for Pad Thai, combine all of the ingredients in a large pot, except for the vinegar, and cook it right before it reaches the boiling point. Allow the sauce to sit in the pot to cool down to 120 degrees, and then mix in vinegar.

To prepare the classic Thai dish, Pad Thai, soak the dry rice stick noodles for at least four hours, or overnight. Boil eight cups of water and briefly blanch the noodles for 30 seconds to soften, drain well and set aside.

In a large wok, add 2 ounces of cooking oil and then crack in four eggs and scramble. Add the blanched noodles to the skillet, and allow to noodles to sauté very briefly in the wok. Go ahead and add about 10 fluid ounces of the sauce and a few dashes of paprika.

Allow the noodles to cook for a minute or until "al dente" — note the sauce should be completely caramelized and not runny or liquidy. Lastly, add fresh bean sprouts and scallions, gently stir to combine with noodles. Garnish with shrimp tempura, crushed peanuts, lime wedge and serve on a glass plate.

To prepare the shrimp tempura, score the shrimp on both sides and then gently pound the shrimp with the flat side of the knife — the shrimp should be elongated. Combine all of the ingredients for the batter in a large mixing bowl — the batter should be quite runny.

Dredge the shrimp in tempura flour and then dip it in the tempura batter until it thoroughly covers the entire shrimp except for the tail. Heat oil to 375 degrees. Slowly dip the battered shrimp into the oil for a couple of seconds before releasing. Quickly cook for about 30 seconds or until crisp. The finished product should be straight with a light, irresistible crunch.

Source: Lotus Leaf Restaurant

is one of his most popular dishes among customers.

RESPONSE

Zheng said foot traffic into the restaurant has increased each week despite the fact he hasn't done any formal advertising. The restaurant, which is open seven-days a week, will offer expanded

hours starting the second week of December because of the demand.

"I honestly want to keep it that way. I think that is the most genuine way to connect with potential diners," he said.

For more information about Lotus Leaf, find it on Facebook or visit www.lotusleafmn.com.

PUBLICNOTICES

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT PUBLIC NOTICE OF AERATION WARNING (Official Publication) AERATION SYSTEM BEGINS OPERATION IN CLEARY LAKE MURPHY LAKE HYLAND LAKE LAKE REBECCA

Three Rivers Park District will operate aeration systems in LAKE REBECCA, CLEARY LAKE, MURPHY LAKE AND HYLAND LAKE after December 1, 2015. Operation of the aeration systems may result in UNSAFE ICE CONDITIONS on portions of the lakes for the duration of the winter. Anyone using the lakes should be aware of the DANGER OF OPEN WATER OR THIN ICE. The aeration system is used to keep fish alive by assuring they receive sufficient oxygen.

Cleary Lake Regional Park is located at 18106 Texas Ave., Prior Lake. Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve is located at 15501 Murphy Lake Road, Savage. Hyland Lake Park Reserve is located at 8737 East Bush Lake Road, Bloomington. Lake Rebecca Park Reserve is located at 9831 County Road 50, Rockford. The parks are operated by Three Rivers Park District. (Published in the Eden Prairie News on Thursday, December 3, 2015; No. 3944)

Early Deadline Notice due to the Christmas and New Year holidays will be Tuesday, December 15, 2015 at NOON for the December 24, 2015 edition and Tuesday, December 22, 2015 at NOON for the December 31, 2015 edition of the Eden Prairie News.

Faxes are not accepted.

MALLO

► continued from 6

(Muslim) conducted a policy of genocide on the Christian population living within its extensive territory. The Sultan, Abdul Hamid (1894-1923) declared a policy of genocide against Christians, killing 1.8 million Greek Christians, 1.8 million Armenian Christians, and 100,000 Syrian Christians. A total of 4 million Christians killed by the Ottoman Empire, which ended with the start of WWI. "My God is better than your God."

The last major religious war was World War II, the Holocaust 1941-45, when 8.4 million Jews were killed, including one million Jewish children. Hitler