

The Ginger Grill



by Butch
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It has been a gradual, almost imperceptible progression, like a long fuse burning in a B-movie western. No Problemo. Green Bean. Calico. Solstice. The Pour Farm Tavern. One by one these businesses opened downtown, adding their names to the ranks of the already-established Freestones, Cat Walk Bar & Grill, Candleworks, Carter's, etc. All of these places are examples of young entrepreneurs taking a chance on this city, my hometown: New Bedford.

Then came the explosion-I remember being at The Pour Farm on a Friday night and stepping outside for some air. The street was alive with throngs of people at 11PM. That's when it hit me- this town is hopping!

This is old news to anyone who has paid attention, but you'd be surprised how many have not. I can't count how many time I've had to enlighten my contemporaries (over 40 :-]) as to what's going on downtown. What follows is a typical exchange:

"Where are you guys playing?" (Referring to my band.)

"We're at the Pour Farm Wednesday."

"Where?"

"The Pour Farm."

"Isn't that in the South End?"

"No, it's on Purchase St! We're also at Rose Alley on Sunday."

"Rose Alley? Where is that?"

"You go by it every day when you drive on Rte. 18."

"Never heard of it."

"Never mind!"

That's what this column is all about. My little contribution to the local explosion of art, music, great food and drink in this little city I call home. Every month I hope to give you some inside info on where to go, what to do, and most importantly, who's making a difference in New Bedford.

I want to start by introducing you to the happiest man I have ever met: His name is Jay Ghim, and he's the owner of Ginger Grill. The first time I saw Jay was at the neighboring establishment, The Pour Farm. He was having a conversation and smiling and filling the bar with that infectious laugh he has. I asked myself, "Who is this happy guy?"



Owner Jay Ghim cooking up some food at the Ginger Grill

Soon I was introduced to the charming man who told me that he would soon be opening a Korean restaurant next door. During the previous weeks I had seen the signage and had watched the progress through the windows of Ginger Grill ,and was genuinely excited for Jay.

A year has gone by since that first meeting (Ginger Grill celebrated its first anniversary on Sept. 9, which was AHA! Night downtown), and recently we sat down on the very same stools at The Pour Farm for a conversation. We were joined by Jay's son, JT.

Of course, I had to ask him what made him so happy. He told me about his hardscrabble life in South Korea. He talked about immigrating to the United States in the 80's, working in the garment industry for years in the New York area, and dealing with the life of the immigrant. He would have informal gatherings at his home and prepare food for his

friends, who would rave about his cooking skills. This got him to thinking, and in the back of his mind he formulated a dream to open a restaurant. JT told me his Dad had a huge notebook full of ideas about the food, the kitchen and the dining room design, down to the tiniest details. Most of Jay's vision for his restaurant has come to fruition at Ginger Grill. Even the tables were custom-made to meet Jay's specifications.

But why New Bedford? Why did he chose this small city over NYC? As it happened, Jay had a friend here whom he visited often and he fell in love with the city. JT says they found something here they couldn't find in New York, where the different ethnic groups insulate themselves from the general population. In New Bedford they found acceptance.

So a few years ago, JT put aside his academic career and started helping his dad with his dream. JT has a Masters in Political Science from UMass Amherst, and was pursuing his PhD (on full scholarship by the way). JT is a brilliant guy, full of ideas and opinions. He took up the business end of things so his Dad could focus on the food, although JT has experience in the food industry as well. He grills a mean lamb chop, and I must say, I could easily eat about 60 of his meat dumplings in one sitting! They are easily the best dumplings I have EVER eaten!!!

The Ghims have been very involved with the community and local politics as well. JT's stand on the recent meal tax debate is widely known: He was against the tax on grounds that the numbers quoted didn't add up. He believes that connecting city employee layoffs with the meal tax was a smokescreen, and I have to agree with him. They also have spearheaded an effort to clean up Wing's Court, the lane that runs in an L-Shape from Union St. to Purchase St. behind several businesses, including Ginger Grill. Although the powers-that-be in the city gave them the brush-off, they still pursue this vision on their own. Their dream is to have a market behind

Ginger Grill with frontage on Wing's Court, where they would sell fresh produce and prepared foods from the Ginger Grill. They imagine a Wing's Court that is safe, beautiful, and well taken care of: a little Boston Common in Downtown New Bedford. (Scoop Alert: JT was just asked to be on the Board of Directors of dNB Inc.)

They also intend of putting together a multitude of cultural events in the coming year while maintaining a high profile in community service. As a Fairhaven resident, JT is looking into getting involved in the Fairhaven political scene.

I guess the question I have to ask myself is: Why do I have to ask Jay what makes him happy? That's the way we all should be. I feel very happy to know these guys, and extremely happy that Jay promised to show me how to make those dumplings.

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