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Food is Family:
Local Eatery is Revolutionizing
Statesboro's Food Scene

By Daria Smith

Warm and welcoming, the serene music eludes your soul from the bustling world outside. Pleasing aromas emerge from the diversity of food, produced by chicken and waffles and foreign cuisine. Ambiance fills the aesthetically pleasing space from the booths to the bar, to the glass sign engraved with the crew's mantra, "Teamwork makes the dream work."

Soyumi is a service-focused Asian kitchen all about "traveling the world through your taste buds," and pushing the bounds under the lead of serial entrepreneur, Adam Tsang.

Tsang is the general manager of The Boiling Shrimp and the co-founder of Two Fly Guys, a media company. Soyumi is a very personal project for Tsang because he grew up in a restaurant that many locals are familiar with, the Peking Chinese Restaurant. Tsang's parents invested hard work to achieve their dreams and always made time for food together as a family.

"I want to do my best to share that experience with the people of Statesboro now," said Tsang. "Soyumi Asian Kitchen is dedicated to bringing you that same experience growing up that I had with my family."

Tsang is extremely grateful for his parents and the phenomenal groundwork they laid for him. He learned discipline through the simple act of being disciplined. Tsang grew up playing piano and his parents disciplined him into practicing, even though he despised it at the time. To this day, music and discipline are part of who Tsang is.

Last year, Tsang was asked to participate in Dancing with the Statesboro Stars, despite having never danced before. Tsang decided to "just go with it" and began practicing daily. By putting his best foot forward, Tsang was able to maximize his potential and ended up winning the competition with his partner.

"It taught me that I am more capable than I could ever imagine," said Tsang. "I actually still dance every day. It's become a part of who I am. In fact, sometimes if you see my staff, they'll tell you that I am just dancing all the time."

Tsang expresses himself through his businesses, food, dancing and music. With each of these disciplines, the underlying structure is the same, said Tsang.

"Once you put in the time and effort, anything is achievable," said Tsang. "But the variable is your hard work... How much of yourself you're willing to sacrifice in order to achieve your dreams."

Humble Beginnings

Tsang relocated to California, after graduating from Statesboro High School, to study computer science, and he attributes a lot of his success to his experiences out there. Computer science takes raw energy and molds it into performing tasks, which Tsang applies to business when he takes resources and shapes them into exactly what he wants.

“Businesses at the end of the day are all the same,” said Tsang. “Food comes in from our vendor, moves through the kitchen and ends up on a plate. Retail shops, logistics... all of it is the same.”

Amidst his California exploration, Tsang worked in corporate to see if it was his niche, but he felt like he was “wasting away, just passing time,” without a purpose. This played a huge role in Tsang’s realization that he didn’t fit the mold of society’s stereotypical 9-5 occupation.

Tsang considered settling elsewhere but decided to reinvest his efforts into Statesboro and capitalized on the opportunity to share his culture with his hometown. Soyumi strives to bring Statesboro a level of cuisine beyond anything they have ever experienced.

“There are always these things that I’m trying to show Statesboro if they want to take the time to listen,” said Tsang.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Soyumi is about so much more than just food. Tsang invests heavily in his team and aspires to lay a foundation for their growth and continuous improvement. This position has allowed Tsang to have the greatest impact on the world around him.

“Me guiding my staff through their lives is far more important than—of course the business has to operate—but, to be able to make a lasting impact on them is huge for me,” said Tsang. “If you take care of your employees, your employees will take care of your customers automatically.”

Brittany Hocker, Soyumi assistant front of house manager, better known as “Adam’s babysitter,” was a Soyumi regular sitting at the bar before being approached with a job opportunity. Hocker had been working as a manager in Pooler, but now she gets to drive six minutes to work every day.

“Working at Soyumi is like nowhere I’ve ever worked before,” said Hocker. “But you know Adam and he makes everything better, bigger, and more exciting than it has to be.”

Taylor Rodgers, Soyumi bartender and server, described her work experience at Soyumi as innovative and fun because there is always something new to learn and she enjoys growing as an individual. Adam is complex: business-minded, yet playful, hard to describe, because he is talented at so many different things, said Rodgers.

“It’s crazy to work with him because you get to see how if you put your mind to something, you can do it,” said Rodgers. “He teaches us to be our best selves in life and grow within ourselves, even though it’s just a restaurant.”

The Soyumi team went bowling and Adam was awful at it, recounted Rodgers. Tsang decided he was going to practice and improve his bowling skills. At Soyumi's next team bowling outing, Rodgers was amazed because, "He just kept bowling and now he bowls better than I do."

Soyumi empowers its team, customers and the local community to live their best lives. Tsang is all about doing things differently from his interview process for hiring talent to the strategies he employs when marketing himself and his passion projects.

Tsang looks for team members that are driven, loyal, and exhibit a desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Tsang assesses self-awareness, adversity, dreams, and whether or not he aligns with what a person wants to achieve.

"Your biggest goal is important to me because I am trying to push you towards that," said Tsang. "What everyone wants is different...I want to help them succeed in whatever they want to reach."

Serving the Community

Two Fly Guys Media was born when Ross Barnett, former host at The Boiling Shrimp, expressed to Tsang, his manager at the time, that he had an interest in video. Barnett took on a video project at The Boiling Shrimp from his standpoint and the rest was history. Tsang constantly leverages all of his businesses, so when Soyumi launched, Ross began filming videos for them.

Tsang has no business being in the rap game, but Two Fly Guys Media curated a rap video that Soyumi released on social media. All parties involved knew the video would be memorable while capturing the attention of their stakeholders amongst the noise.

"I love that guy, I feel like he's just so willing to help," said Phillip Klayman, local entrepreneur, author and Three Tree Coffee Roasters co-founder. "He's a strategic thinker, smart, driven and I immediately just loved his business mind. He does this shock and awe sort of marketing, and it's fantastic."

Tsang maintains a close partnership with Klayman. The pair first met three years ago before Three Tree had a shop when Tsang came out to the old roasting facility and gave some incredible feedback that Three Tree still utilizes to this day, said Klayman. Ever since, they have continued to meet once a week.

"I think what initially stood out to me about Soyumi was their ability to take one niche and do it exceptionally well," said Klayman. "It's Southern meets Asian fusion and they've done it so well, which is obvious everywhere in their branding, especially in their menu."

Soyumi partners with Three Tree to offer coffee and an espresso martini on their menu. Papa Buck's, a barbeque joint in Metter, did a pop-up with Soyumi who served their food in the restaurant, blending Soyumi's Asian cuisine with Papa Buck's barbeque.

Soyumi is becoming well known throughout the community for their Facebook video series, “You Got Served,” where Tsang serves local businesses and organizations that serve the community. Viewers comment and decide which business or organization will receive a complimentary lunch on the next episode of “You Got Served.”

“At the end of the day, I want to everybody to work together to achieve their goals,” said Tsang. “The way you do anything is the way you do everything.”

Perspective

Tsang’s biggest obstacle is himself. Although Tsang has a knack for managing stress, everything is on him at the end of the day—if it’s a failure or a success. In any situation, there is a choice to either dwell on mistakes or realize that “you figured out another way not to do something,” said Tsang.

“If you get into your mind and beat yourself up about a decision, there is no way that you are going to be able to operate,” said Tsang. “I don’t believe in burnout. Being able to have a positive perspective is what alters your reality.”

For the year and eight months that Soyumi has served Statesboro, Tsang has taken off eight days at most, excluding holidays. For self-proclaimed “hustler, creative and businessman,” the grind never ends. Even on holidays, Tsang is doing something, “business as always.”

Tsang averages 80 to 90 hours during a typical work week, which shocks most members of society. Most people pass up the opportunity to have control of their lives, said Tsang. Vacations don’t exist for the diligent mastermind behind Soyumi.

In today’s social media driven world, reality is skewed, and it is cliché to be an entrepreneur. However, the American culture is blind to the blood, sweat, tears, hard work and discipline that underlie every modern mogul’s innovative expression of self.

“People are driven by the media, so it’s cool right now to be an entrepreneur,” said Tsang. “I don’t call myself an entrepreneur until the point where other people call me an entrepreneur.”

When asked about his future vision for Soyumi, Tsang had only two words, “world domination.”

“Being able to have a positive impact on the people that interact with me, I want to leave a lasting effect on the people that interact with me on a day-to-day basis,” said Tsang. “I want to change the way that people live their lives.”