

# JOHNNY LIU OF CAFÉ AT PHARR

by Jewel Hazelton

**T**ucked away in a cute little house on Pharr Road in Buckhead is Café at Pharr, a small mom-and-pop shop that provides you with the best lunch experience with a Southern touch. Known for cheap eats and great customer service, you are sure to feel like you're dining at home.

Café at Pharr has been around since 1993, so I sat down with owner Johnny Liu to ask him how he has been successful at making his business last for over a decade.

**Q: Tell me about your restaurant and how you got started in the industry?**

A: My parents, Mike and Shirley, opened the cafe in 1993. The cafe originally opened as a bakery serving deserts and pastries, and after a couple of years evolved into a cafe serving sandwiches and salads to the health conscious community. In 1998, my parents decided they were ready to retire and handed the business over to me, and I have been taking care of everything ever since.

**Q: What inspired your parents to open their restaurant?**

A: The American dream! Dad was actually in the software business in NYC but got laid off unexpectedly. I think that scared him, and he decided to go into business for himself. It was a long journey though. We started in San Francisco with a fish and chips shop that had to close down. That was a blessing in disguise because that prompted us to move to Atlanta shortly after closing down.

**Q: How did you select Buckhead as your location?**

A: Believe it or not, Pharr Road at the time was the only location we could afford in the area. We also lived nearby and wanted our business close to home.

**Q: How have you remained successful for so many years? What advice would you give to a newbie in the business on how to remain successful?**

A: Our motto is less is more... and simplicity is what makes us continue to be successful.... We are as loyal to our customers as they are to us, and it is important to us that they be greeted with a smiling face daily. We want them to feel welcome and part of our family as well.

As for advice for any newbies getting into the business, prepare to work hard and hang in there. We almost

closed our doors the winter of '95 but were able to hang in there, and that following summer business took off, and we established ourselves as Café at Pharr. (We were Mikan Bakery at the time.)

**Q: Your restaurant has been in the Atlanta area for several years, what have you enjoyed most about your job?**

A: Meeting and getting to know new Atlantans everyday and watching their families and children grow.

**Q: Has the economy affected your business?**

A: Our daily operations remain at 100 percent, but our catering and office luncheons, which make up for about 30 percent of our daily business, have dropped dramatically. We are hoping that with the New Year, some of our catering will pick up.

**Q: Where are you from originally and what part of Atlanta do you live in now?**

A: Actually, you would think I'm an army brat. I have lived in Atlanta for 24 years so I have seen it grow to what it is now. But I was born in Sao Palo, Brazil; my nationality is Taiwanese, but I'm raised in the South! I like to say I have the passion of a South American, appearance of an Asian person and a heart of a Southern gentleman. My wife, 2-year-old son and I currently live in Brookhaven and love it!

**Q: When not cooking, what do you enjoy doing?**

A: I enjoy spending time with my wife, Katie, and my 2-year-old son, Gavin. My wife and I love to travel and try to go to new places as much as we can. I also enjoy snowboarding, going to movies and hanging out with my friends.

**Q: What makes your restaurant stand out from others?**



Johnny Liu

A: I feel like our restaurant is really a neighborhood cafe where everybody knows your name and your orders... most of the time! It's a mom-and-pop shop with a small town feel in a big city.

**Q: As a first time customer, what would you recommend I order off the menu?**

A: Definitely our walnut chicken salad. It's our Pharr Road Phavorite!

**Q: Are you the only owner of your restaurant?**

A: Mom, Dad and I own the business.... It is family owned and family run, and I believe that contributes a lot to our success.

**Q: Anything else?**

A: Thank you for taking the time to interview us, and we hope that you find dining with us a pleasurable experience and will become a regular.

*Café at Pharr is located at 316 Pharr Rd. NE in Atlanta. Contact 404-238-9288 for more information.*