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Jeff Lin at First Wok wants to give back to community

Half of proceeds for Customer Appreciation Day to go to charity

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Jeff Lin checks the progress of his daughter Megan Lin's homework at First Wok in Park Hills. Jeff Lin is having a Customer Appreciation Day at both his restaurants to thank the community for its support over the years. Not only will the buffet be available for a discounted price, but he is donating half the proceeds from the meals at each restaurant to charity.

Renée Jean / Daily Journal

He's a Farmington businessman who has come a long way.

Jeff Lin grew up on the coast of China within eyesight of Taiwan. It was a glimpse of a wider world, but a world he could then only dream about.

There were four children in Lin's family, but only two finished high school. Two quit early to take jobs and help their family financially.

Growing up, Lin didn't always have all the school supplies he needed for school and his clothes were usually hand-me-downs. His family made many sacrifices to send their children to school, the father essentially working two jobs, but money was always tight. Still the parents wanted to one day send both children still in school to college.

Ultimately, only one child went. Money was just so tight, and his parents were working so hard just to put food on the table. Jeff decided to get a job and help the family make a living instead.

But jobs in China for someone at his skill level were not plentiful. There was an aunt living in the United States with a restaurant, and a job opportunity as a dish washer — if he wanted that ...

He took the job. It was a humble start in a land known the world over as the land of opportunity, but it was the beginning of a journey that led him to the Parkland, where he now owns two restaurants of his own. He opened the first in Farmington in 2003 and he opened the second in Park Hills in 2012. They are both called First Wok, though Lin often refers to the Park Hills store as Second Wok.

Lin says it is thanks to the kindness of the community in the Parkland that he has been able to prosper and become successful, and he wants the community at large to know he is grateful for the support and encouragement over the years.

For that reason, he's having what he calls a Customer Appreciation Day at both his stores. Not only will the buffet and drink be available for the discounted price of \$3.99, but half the proceeds from each meal will be donated to charity.

The buffet in Farmington is Sept. 22 and the one in Park Hills is Sept. 16. The hours are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., and he hopes the community will come and help him raise a lot of money for the chosen charities.

The charities he has picked this year are both youth Bible study programs, one at Esther Baptist Church called Teen-Kids, and the other at First Baptist Church of Delassus called Awana. Lin hopes to raise at least \$500 for each church from the two stores.

This is not the first time Lin has had a Customer Appreciation Day. It's a tradition that started several years ago and was inspired by the kind gesture of a friend, Pat Brady.

Brady had struck up a conversation over dinner one night at Lin's newly opened Farmington restaurant, curious about the newcomer in town. At the time, Lin's restaurant wasn't really all that successful, and the family was struggling.

"Those first years, I don't know how you say it exactly, but we didn't really make any money," Lin said.

Brady eventually learned of Lin's difficulties and the members of Brady's church decided to lend the family a hand, bringing clothes and toys for Jeff's little girl, Megan.

"There was even a learning computer," Lin recalls. It would make the correct vocabulary sounds so his daughter could learn to spell and speak English correctly.

Lin was reminded of those days when he didn't have all the school supplies he needed. The church's kindness touched him deeply.

"The church people doing so much made me feel like when we have a little bit extra we need to share a little bit and give back," Lin said.

Lin had the first Customer Appreciation day a year or two after that and has been having them ever since.

"Sometimes we give money for school supplies, other times we have given money to churches for programs they do," Lin said. "I didn't know anyone when I first came here in 2003, but the community has supported and encouraged us all the same. I just want to thank everyone who has supported us and give a little something back to the community."

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