

Restaurant owners made career change

By CRYSTAL LU

Gumba's, an old pizzeria across from the Cupertino post office on Stevens Creek Boulevard, has recently had a facelift.

New Burgundy tablecloths and wooden seats have replaced mismatched furniture. On the walls are paintings of Italian towns.

The menu has also been upgraded. It keeps all the popular old items, such as pizzas and calzones, but has added soups and a bigger selection of wine and desserts.

The changes have been made by new co-owners Katie Chong, Vanessa Chuang and Linda Sewnarain, who took over the Pizzeria at 21678 Stevens Creek Blvd. when its prior owner relocated. They decided to apply what they had learned from culinary school to the joint venture.

It was a career change for all of them. Sewnarain used to be an electrical engineer. Chong was in finance and Chuang in human resources. They were fine with their previous jobs but liked cooking more, so they attended culinary school in their spare time.

The three women met through their husbands, who worked together in the information technology industry, and became good friends.

"Our husbands are very supportive," says Sewnarain. "They often come to help out in the evening." The three women have only one kitchen helper, who used to work for the old Gumba's. All three of the owners wear different hats—chefs, cashiers and servers.

Chuang is also the pastry chef. Her almond custard cake is a favorite of many customers. To advertise Chuang's specialties, the new Gumba's gives out free nickel-sized cookies instead of mints or candy at the end of every meal.

"Customers like these minicookies and order bigger ones of the same kind to go," says Chuang. Besides Gumba's, Chong, Chuang, and Sewnarain also run a catering company named Three Chives. The catering menu is different from the restaurant menu and can be customized.

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Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer
Katie Chong, Vanessa Chuang and Linda Sewnarain (left to right) are the new co-owners of Gumba's, an Italian restaurant in Cupertino.

"We keep experimenting to see what our customers like," says Sewnarain. "Service here is excellent, very friendly," says Ian Robsonpalencia, a customer who works for AT&T in San Francisco but sometimes comes to Cupertino on business.

"Their burgers are the best in Cupertino," says Gil Palencia, another customer. The busy pizzeria and catering company will be short-staffed in March for Chong's maternity leave. Chuang and Sewnarain say they may consider hiring help if business keeps expanding.

"This was initially a trial venture," says Sewnarain. "But now we believe we're going to stay."

***Gumba's is open Monday
through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.***