



Council President Pro Tem
Barbara Bry
Council District 1



Dear Neighbors,

Over the past few weeks, this newsletter has brought you stories of District 1 small businesses that have either been decimated by the pandemic or who have been lucky to squeak by with assistance from government programs.

This week, we check in with two small businesses that opened **during** the pandemic. Pulling off this feat was even harder than you can imagine for Saigon Spring Jewelry and MVP Family Restaurant of La Jolla. Businesses that opened during the pandemic are not eligible for government assistance. On top of that, one of these two establishments was burglarized the week before opening...

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If you own a D1 small business and have a pandemic story you would like to share with the community, please e-mail BarbaraBry@sandiego.gov.

New Jeweler in 'The Jewel'

*Name: Saigon Spring Jewelry
Location: 7703 Fay Ave., La Jolla
Phone: (858) 255-8085
Website: www.saigonspringjewelry.com
Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily
Co-owners: Trang Pham and Anthony Hathuc*

Some wander into Saigon Spring Jewelry to buy a Mookaite Jasper necklace they eyed in the window. Others just want to tell the owners — La Jolla residents Trang Pham and her husband, Anthony Hathuc — how brave they are.

"They say, 'I can't believe you opened in the middle of the pandemic!'" said Pham, who crafts all the store's fashion jewelry by hand. "But it just happened."

Pham already owned a successful jewelry store in her native Vietnam, which she closed to be with Hathuc four years ago. (The couple — who met while Hathuc briefly worked in Vietnam many years ago — married last December.)

Pham had been wanting to get back into the business when Timeless Treasures, a fine jewelry store, vacated its space at 7703 Fay Ave. Through a real-estate agent, she and Hathuc were offered a month of reduced rent for taking over the former proprietor's lease.

"We always wanted to have a store," Pham said. "Yes, it happened to be during the pandemic, but if we didn't take the opportunity, then I don't think we could have had it."

Hathuc is also from Vietnam. He immigrated in 1975, as a 14-year-old refugee. (He was housed at Camp Pendleton until he, his mother and his four siblings found a sponsor.) A former senior scientist at General Atomics, Hathuc now works for a Carlsbad web-hosting company, working remotely from an office in back of Saigon Spring.

"We're happy that we can go to work together every day," Pham said.

Pham and Hathuc fixed the store up themselves, exhausting all of his personal savings in the process. And then the store got burglarized a week before opening! (Luckily, the thief only made off with \$245 worth of merchandise.)

"We left the door slightly open to wait for a delivery," Pham said. "I was working in the back room. A guy came in and took a pendant, and he came back again to take our box that just got delivered. We consider this as a lesson for us to be more cautious."

So far, Pham said, there's "not enough data" to say how well the store is doing. "But from our first month, we made enough to cover our expenses, so we're happy with that," she said.

Asked where she finds the strength to persevere, Pham replied: "I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to pursue my dream. It scares me every day, but we don't know what else we can do but keep moving."



Trang Pham and her husband, Anthony Hathuc, opened Saigon Spring Jewelry on Sept. 5, 2020.

MVP's Opening Day Differs from Game Plan

Name: MVP Family Restaurant

Location: 811 Prospect St., La Jolla

Phone: (858) 352-6578

Website: www.kernfamilyrestaurants.com

Hours: 8 a.m.-9 p.m. daily

Co-owners: Ned Kern, Sami Kern, Zach Kern, Lauren Kern



Ned Kern once co-owned and operated 24 Denny's restaurants in upstate New York and Phoenix. His family-owned, family-style La Jolla restaurant opened on June 7.

MVP Family Restaurant was eight months into its buildout when the pandemic hit. Its lease was signed back in August 2019. As they say in poker, it was pot-committed.

"This is a really, really tough time to be opening a restaurant," said Solana Beach native Ned Kern, who co-owns the establishment with his wife, his son and his daughter-in-law.

MVP serves traditional American cuisine but from scratch — curing its own bacon, baking its own bread and even pickling its own pickles. It also playfully mixes up tradition, for instance serving "roast beef fries" with horseradish and onion jam. Its walls burst with sports memorabilia, including one adorned by 5,000 baseball cards.

The concept came from Zach, Kern's son, chef and partner. A culinary-school graduate, he interned at Searsucker San Diego and regularly pitched restaurant ideas to his dad.

"We were involved in sports as a family for years, and one of the problems was that we couldn't find places to bring large teams," said Kern, whose children played high-school football, baseball, softball and basketball. "So Zach suggested a restaurant where large groups could gather, get high-

quality food quickly, and feel like they were welcomed in."

Longtime La Jolla lovers will remember the 4,200-square-foot building for once having been an International House of Pancakes. More recently, it was called home by Amici's Pizzeria, StreetCar Merchants and Parachute Brunch and Supper House, which shuttered last year.

According to Kern, parents from the Bishop's School and several nearby churches expressed interest in bringing their teams to MVP, as did a retirement home looking for a regular weekly outing.

"We were all excited," Kern said. "This was the right place for this concept."

Whether it was the right time is another story. MVP didn't open until June 7 for takeout, and June 20 for in-house dining, too late for intramural sports. Ned said business picks up on the weekends, but is "pretty slow" on weekdays.

Luckily, Kern said, Inn by the Sea Hotel, which owns the land, has been "understanding."

"They're a great landlord and they're working with us at this point," Kern said. "We're grateful."

Kern said he prefers to maintain a positive outlook on things that are outside of his control.

"During this time, there is a need for places like ours to fulfill a sense of normalcy," he said, recalling a recent phone call from a woman whose parents had not left their house in months.

"They came to our restaurant and felt safe, they felt welcomed, and she thanked us for that," he said. "We wanted to be the best part of peoples' day before the pandemic, and even though it is on a smaller scale, we still fill this need."