ENTREPRENEUR SPOTLIGHT: *Eddie Wu*

Eddie Wu
Founder & Owner of Cook St. Paul

INDUSTRY
Restaurant
LOCATION
1124 Payne Ave, St Paul, MN
WEBSITE
www.cookstp.com
NDC SERVICES ACCESSED
Small Business Loan
Business Services

Eddie Wu always had a way with restoring things. At the age of six he started his first business selling refurbished rocks from his backyard. He hand-picked the rocks and shined them with clear nail polish giving the rocks a glow that made them a hot commodity. Some days, he would spend 10 hours selling rocks door to door.

Over the years, Eddie continued to seek out any odd jobs he could–mowing lawns, shoveling snow, running lemonade stands and even organizing garage sales. In 2014, Cook St. Paul opened in what was once a 67-year-old all-American diner on Payne Avenue. The Korean-influenced American diner prides itself on serving to a customer base that "cares about the quality of the food they eat, desires a high level of service and knows you don't have to pay a premium for those things."

STIRRING THINGS UP ON PAYNE AVENUE

Today, Eddie has expanded into adventurous new fields–Cook St. Paul hosts wildly popular pop-ups, showcasing one-time menus created by different local chefs/chef collaborations. He is working on selling his house-made hot sauce and signature drink–the Eddie Wu–in grocery stores. He also serves as a community leader and mentor for businesses in East Saint Paul. Eddie is someone to watch in the Twin Cities culinary scene.

CHALLENGES SERVE AS CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS

Shortly after opening Cook St. Paul, Eddie's business partner and chef quit unexpectedly, invalidating their business plan and throwing the future of the restaurant into question. Within a couple months, Eddie found himself out $20k in unexpected expenses related to the loss of his business partner and working 12-14 hour days for weeks straight. Burnt out and on the brink of breaking under pressure, the most difficult decision Eddie says he has faced since opening the business was simply whether to keep it open. A $10,000 dollar loan allowed Eddie to pay off debts that threatened to push the restaurant under. Eddie thought something like this wouldn't come for many months, if not years.

"Because of NDC and its amazing staff I have been able to expand my business, actually start paying myself a livable wage and spend more time with my wife and children." – Eddie

PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF

Cook St. Paul continued to gain recognition for its unique menu and quality food, but even though Eddie was making great sales, the restaurant stayed cash poor for months on end. It was at this difficult time that NDC Staff member Mary Kuria helped Cook catch up on accounting, improve efficiency and cut costs through weekly visits.

"Success was only limited by what I was willing to do." – Eddie

With insight on the cost of goods and scheduling, Ben Johnson, the Real Estate Project Developer at NDC was able to help Eddie with the technical processes of the restaurant. Eddie explains that Ben's "ability to look at numbers, to create, navigate, and implement spreadsheets is mind boggling."

After years spent at various restaurants, 5 years of service in the Marines and studying international business, Eddie's dream for Cook St. Paul is now becoming a reality. In the end, the loss of a business partner turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Eddie now runs one of the most raved about restaurants in the Twin Cities as the City Pages Best Diner of 2015.