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Kenny King

King of the neighborhood

Local restaurant celebrates 30 years

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Bulletin staff

Step out onto River Street with Kenny King and you'll see just how much attention he gets. People in cars wave and shout greetings while passersby stop for hellos and handshakes. This month, he and his family are celebrating the 30th anniversary of their Chinese restaurant, King's House. While other restaurants have come and gone, or changed ownership without fanfare, King's House has remained a neighborhood staple.

Kenny King's parents opened the restaurant in 1975, bringing their cache of traditional Chinese recipes to the people of Hyde Park with the intention of offering simple, but delicious made-to-order meals.

Not much has changed in the past 30 years. The restaurant became a member

of Hyde Park Main Streets. Some new menu items have appeared, like fried plantains and crab Rangoons, but the restaurant itself has basically stayed the same. A few chairs and tables sit against the walls, which the family keeps around for those who want to sit and chat, but the main body of King's House's business comes from take-out customers like Laura Diorio.

"This place is the best," she said. "Not only the food, but the friendliness keeps me coming back. I've been eating here since I was a teenager because everyone is so awesome. Now my daughter comes here."

Generations, explains Diane Chung, Kenny King's daughter, have grown up eating King's House cuisine and, ironi-

cally, that is part of why the family has chosen not to expand. Their advertising comes primarily through word of mouth and all of the restaurant's sauces are still made from scratch. When Diorio picks up her order, she is greeted by name.

"My dad wants to keep the restaurant small because he wants ensure that it stays a neighborhood spot where everyone knows each other," Chung said. "He knows people's names and their favorite dishes, and the customers really like that."

Kenny King is the heart of the restaurant and almost always present during its hours of operation. They open late, at 4 p.m., he said, because he is the main cook and likes to be around to make sure that everything that comes out of the kitchen adheres to his standards of quality. He couldn't do that if King's House was open from noon to midnight, six days a week.

Despite the late hours, for Kenny King, the restaurant business is ideal because he enjoys interacting with people.

"Owning King's House is not a money thing," he said. "My father told me to treat people right and they'd come back. I like people and people like me. I still get a lot of the same customers coming in, but new generations of people enjoy my food as well."

Chung told the story of one patron who was so enamored with the King's cuisine that, when he moved to California, he asked his parents to ship him boxes of the restaurant's food packed in ice. Both the mayor and Councilor Rob Consalvo have frequented King's House.

"Not only is Kenny King an area business owner, but he lives in the neighborhood, too," Consalvo said. "He's a legend in Hyde Park and his restaurant is a local landmark. Everyone knows Kenny and everyone eats at King's House. I've eaten there my entire life and I'm practically putting his kids through college. Even my kids love King's House."

To say that the family behind King's House is involved in the neighborhood is an understatement. They participate in happenings around Hyde Park in various capacities and even list upcoming community events on the restaurant's Web site. Chung grew up doing homework at the tables in King's House, watching the endless stream of friendly locals coming through the restaurant's doors to pick up their orders and make small talk with her dad. Those same people now marvel at how much she has grown.

Diorio, who favors the chicken wings that have in recent years become a popular favorite, says that King's House has the best Chinese food in town, but it's the people that make it a special addition to the neighborhood.

"Kenny just knows everyone in Hyde Park," she said. "He treats us like family."

King

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