

Grace Poon and her husband, Kwai, ran the Family Chow Mein Chinese Restaurant and Ice Cream Factory from 1982 to 1984 in Shakopee.

Grace and Kwai's dream was to open a restaurant in Shakopee, featuring a wide selection of Cantonese, Peking, Shanghai, and Szechuan cooking styles.

When they arrived in Minnesota, Grace worked for ten years at Catholic Charities, as she got a degree and worked with people with disabilities.

While that was satisfying, she wanted a certain amount of independence, to be her own boss, and to run her own business.

Kwai and Grace Poon, along with their two boys, Gary and Raymond, enjoyed cooking at the the Family Chow Mein Chinese Restaurant and Ice Cream Factory, first across from the library after The Sweet Treat Factory left. Later, they moved to First Avenue, where Hennen's Skelly Station was located. The Hennen gas station moved east on First Avenue.



There is a concept of Chinese philosophy of keeping everything in balance and to serve others.

"I have always liked to work with people and serve food," Grace said. She used family recipes she learned as a child in Hong Kong. To ensure consistent quality, Grace did all the cooking herself, refusing to let anyone else near her kitchen, according to the February 24, 1982 *Shakopee Valley News*.

"I shouldn't say it, but I don't trust other people to cook," Grace explained. "People wait a little while, but it's worth it for the quality."

According to the July 25, 1984 *Shakopee Valley News*, the family decided to move from the Huber Building to 237 First Avenue, where they converted the vacant lot (it had been the Hennen Skelly Station) to Family Chow Mein Chinese Restaurant and Ice Cream Factory.

The Poons originally took over the space at the Huber Building that was The Sweet Treat Ice Cream Parlor. Because of the connection, and because Shakopee residents love ice cream, the family decided to continue selling ice cream cones, sundaes, shakes, and malts.









“The main items on their menu, however, are the Chinese dishes. There are appetizers like egg rolls and fried chicken wings, soups, chow mein, both American and Cantonese (Cantonese chow mein has soft noodles and is stir-fry cooking), chicken, pork, beef, sea goods, and egg foo young. Included on the menu are several American sandwiches, including hamburgers.”

“This is especially for the young people who come in here with their parents and are afraid to try the Chinese food,” said Grace.

Grace spent long hours at the restaurant, often working 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

On Sunday, well, sometimes Grace and Kwai and their two sons, Gary and Raymond rested. But usually, they cleaned the kitchen!

Bibliography

“Chinese restaurant relocates; gains viability, business.” *Shakopee Valley News*, 25 July 1984.

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