

# Thai Express coming to Cape Breton

## Restaurant set to open mid-March in Sydney

Cape Breton Post · 27 Jan 2021 · GREG MCNEIL greg.mcneil@cbpost.com @capebretonpost

SYDNEY — Shop local, buy local, and support local are not surprising comments to hear from a local entrepreneur or service club member. It's always a breath of fresh air to hear them from a newcomer to the community, though.



Bing (Shibin) Xu admits to being a bit surprised to hear himself reminding residents of the importance of such things eight years after he arrived in Cape Breton from Dalian, China as an international student in search of an education.

“Even when I graduated, the first thought was about the rest of my friends, most of them, moving to a big city for more job opportunities,” said Xu, a Sydney Rotary Club member and business owner.

“At that time if someone said you were going to spend the rest of your life here I would be shocked, but here I am. This feels more comfortable.”

Over eight years ago he described himself as just a kid with no clue. He had to search a map to find Cape Breton.

“The first time I heard of Sydney was Australia. I never thought there was another Sydney.”

Since then, he's earned a bachelor of hospitality and tourism management degree from Cape Breton University, became a permanent resident, a homeowner and a partner in the opening of the A Bite of Asia restaurant on Dorchester Street in Sydney.

Supporting local has been part of his informal education in Cape Breton which led him to the Sydney Rotary Club.

Club president Darren Vallis described Xu as an active club member and is pleased to see a former international student entrenching himself in the community in trying to make a difference.

“He's a great guy and he's always willing to help,” said Vallis. “He's helped out with some ribfests in the past and he's volunteered for a few events. He's great to have around.”

Xu has sold his shares in A Bite of Asia and hopes his latest impact on the community will come from jobs created through a new business venture that will bring the Thai Express franchise to Sydney in March.

“To me, it is a big step and, generally speaking, restaurants are very risky, especially under COVID-19,” Xu said.

“We understand in the beginning we won't become rich people the next day; It is not going to happen. For us, we are trying to survive first. For us, it is more like a day-to-day job. We will be working the store every day to make sure it is running well.”

To ensure his latest business venture would be a success, Xu and business partner He Liu spent much of last year working in eight different Thai Express restaurants in the Maritimes to learn the business first-hand including how to open a new restaurant in a new community.

“The concept I like about this fast-food brand is everything is in front of you,” Xu said.

“You can see how we flip the wok, you get to see the flames, how we flavour the woks and add sauce. The whole process, we hide nothing from the customers. A lot of people love this. It is more like a show.”

Xu said the chain is popular across Canada and he was surprised it hadn't already come to Cape Breton.

“I know people in Cape

Breton embrace the diverse tastes and they are looking for other countries' flavours so to me this makes sense.”

He knows that opening a restaurant is a risky venture at any time, but especially in the midst of a pandemic. Although he is encouraged by the established success of takeout at the chain's other Canadian locations where the green take out boxes have become very recognizable.

Just like businesspeople who have spent their entire lives in Cape Breton, he's also encouraged by the major construction projects in this area and the value of CBU that has brought many international students like himself to Cape Breton.

Both are indicators of future economic success for the island, he said.

“I saw several friends that came back to Sydney already. They moved out and came back already.

“Then, I read the news about the Nova Scotia population (growing) and it seems like we are going in the right direction. So far, I'm hoping when the pandemic is under control, we are hoping CBU can reopen and that will be a big help for all the local restaurants and all the local businesses. We are waiting for that, for sure.”

He has other ideas for other business ventures in the future but will focus on making Thai Express a success for now.

“I am not an outsider anymore. I put everything I can into here so I am not going anywhere.”

The Prince Street Plaza Thai Express is tentatively set for a mid-March opening and will have between 10-15 employees once hiring begins next month, including the two hands-on business partners. It will feature 43 seats and have an added emphasis on takeout and delivery.