

Wok n' Roll

ASIAN BISTRO

Fast Food Asian Style on Broadway

BY LEE PERLMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Upwardly mobile Bac Nguyen has moved her Wok n' Roll restaurant down the street to meet a higher standard.

What had been a popular Oriental fast food operation in the old Holladay Market building moved last month into the old Cadillac Café quarters at 918 N.E. Broadway. The restaurant offers authentic Vietnamese dishes, plus some Chinese and Thai specialties, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and 5 to 9 p.m. daily. The restaurant will also offer beer and wine for the first time.

"We certainly hope it will be a success," says Edison Sweet, Wok n' Roll founder and Nguyen's partner in the operation. He will handle the business aspects of the operation while Nguyen handles the food.

Born and raised in a coastal city in Vietnam, Nguyen emigrated to Indonesia in 1981. "I was seeking a better life," she told *The Portland Observer*. "Life in Vietnam was a little hard. I didn't have much freedom."

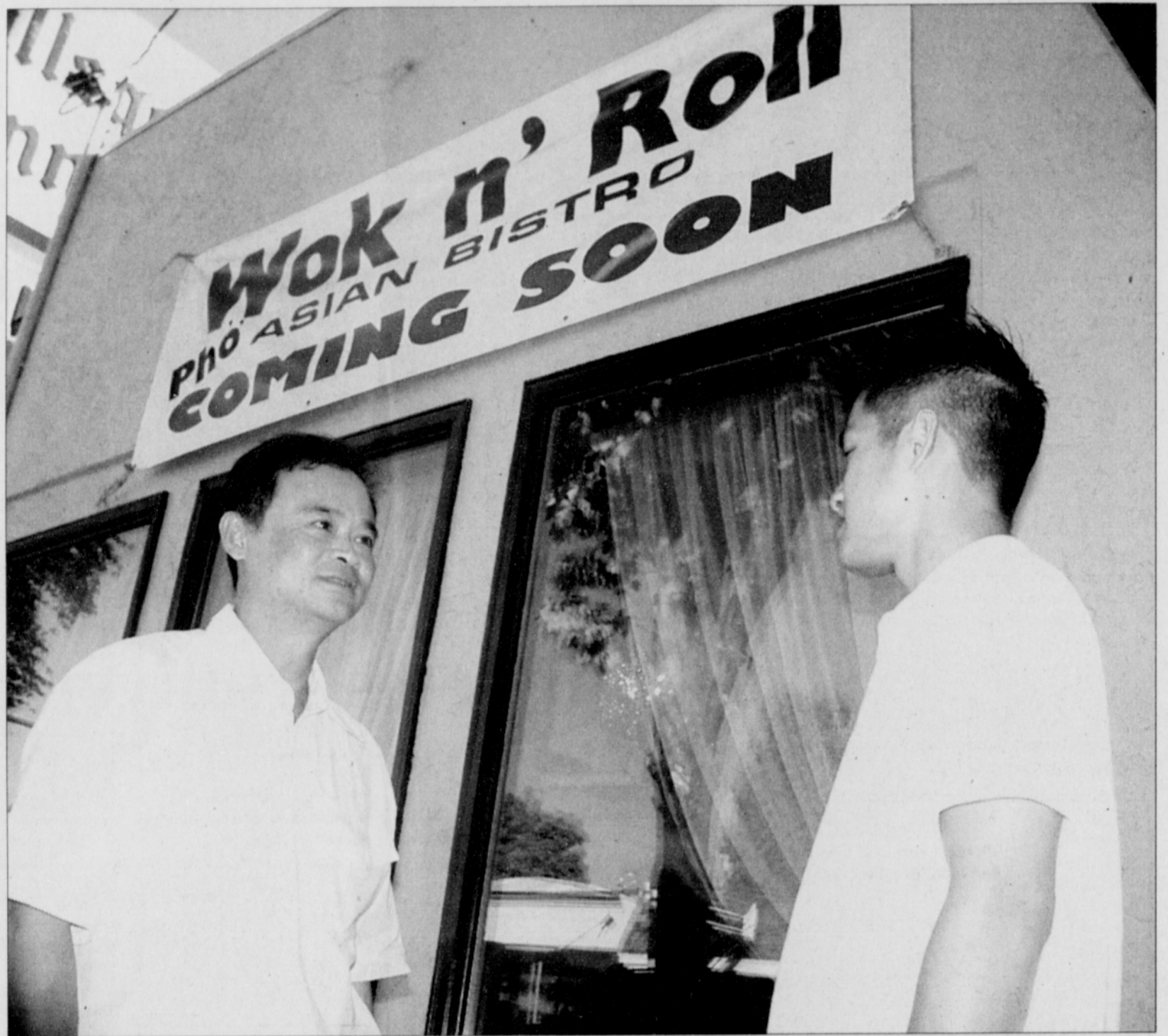
During her four months in a refugee camp in Indonesia, "I had a lot of fun," she said. Nguyen also had her first business venture there, selling fruit and vegetables in a small market.

Moving to Portland, she studied English and worked as an assistant chef before opening her first restaurant, Thai Binh, located at Northeast 79th and Glisan St., in 1989. She sold it two years later, and dropped out of the labor market for two years when she had her first child.

Nguyen went back to work in 1992 when Bee opened Wok n' Roll, and later bought the restaurant from him in 1996.

"My biggest problem was being a woman and taking care of the restaurant," she says. "I had to be the chef, the cashier, make deliveries and take care of my (three) children all by myself. As a woman, I have this responsibility; my husband wasn't around." The couple had divorced in 1995. Nguyen also had difficulty in communicating in English with her customers, and often relied on her children to translate for her.

"She's just wonderful," Bee says of Nguyen. "I've helped her ever since she came over. It's been a great experience."



Edison Bee (left), of Wok n' Roll Asian Bistro, with employee Quange Le, outside Bee's recently opened restaurant at 914 N.E. Broadway, featuring a delicious menu of Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese cuisine.

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