

# Entrepreneurs Live American Dream

continued ▲ from Front

catessen offering beef jerky. The Huyhns are negotiating with additional commercial clients.

The family fled Vietnam when Mytien was three, spending a year in a refugee camp in Thailand before emigrating to the United States and Portland in 1979. Mytien, who speaks perfect English, says she doesn't remember much about the camp but that she understands the family's treatment there was "fairly decent."

The Huyhns operated a variety of businesses in Portland—a restaurant, sports bar, video store and beauty salon—before opening the Portland Beauty School in 1997. Their experience with the salon showed them "there was a demand for a quality beauty school," Mytien told the Port-



Mytien Huyhn Kent and her brother Tieno Huyhn opened the Portland Beauty School in 1997. The school offers 10 courses in hair care, nail care, skin care and massage therapy.

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MARK  
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land Observer.

The school offers 10 courses in hair care, nail care, "aesthetics" (skin care), some combinations of the above, and massage therapy. There are courses to make the courses "student-friendly."

For instance, Mytien says, "All schools have start and end dates for their courses. In most schools, if you need extra instruction to pass your exams after the end date, they'll charge an extra \$28 to \$30 an hour. We don't charge anything. (The exceptions are courses for massage therapy and instructors). We want our students to feel confident of their ability when they leave."

On the other hand, they also allow for exceptionally fast students. Their course in hair, nails and aesthetics normally takes 2,300 hours of instruction to complete.

"But if the students can pass their exams after 1,500 hours, we don't force them to wait around," she says.

There are similar bargains for customers. The school offers basic haircuts for \$4, haircuts with shampoo and styling for \$7, beard trims for \$3, wig styling for \$8, facials for \$8, manicures for \$8, pedicures for \$12, hair coloring for \$20 or more, and waxing.

The school had become too popular for its old location in a mall immediately north of their current location, next to a pet clinic.

"We were bursting at the seams, and parking was a problem," Mytien says. "Also, it had always been a dream of the family to own their own space instead of leasing."

So the family decided to build their own spaces on the property to the south, part of a former landfill.

"Financing was the easy part," Mytien says. "We had

to go through a lot of different processes with the city to get approval. The people were fairly helpful, but we had to do a lot of legwork ourselves." At that, she says, "We were very fortunate. Some people before us put a lot of money into an idea for this space that didn't pan out."

The Plaza consists of two long single-story buildings whose roofs are reminiscent of pagodas. The Huyhns created the concept, although LRS Architects did the detailed design.

The main part of the former landfill, 26 acres, was nearly sold last year to SmartCentres of Canada, which proposed to build a 190,000 square foot "big box" retail project on the site.

Galvanized by fear of a Wal-Mart at the location, community volunteers from the Madison South and Roseway neighborhood associations put together a massive opposition campaign that drove the developers away.

While conducting a tour of the area for the Portland Planning Commission, several neighborhood organizers pointed to the Asian-American Plaza as the sort of development they'd rather see on the land.

Mytien says the affection is mutual.

"We love this location," she says. "We want to help the neighborhood grow. Many of our students and clients are from the neighborhood." On the other hand, some come from as far away as Salem, Tigard, Hillsboro and southern Washington.

The school is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, as well as 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. It can be reached at 503-255-6303 or portlandbeautyschool.com.

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## Housing Authority Taps Local Leaders

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The Housing Authority of Portland has filled two seats on its board of commissioners. Shelli Romero assumes a Portland seat on the board and Jim Smith fills a Multnomah County seat.

"Shelli and Jim bring unique skills and work experiences to HAP. It will be great to add their strengths to our board, particularly with the large number of new projects and initiatives on our plate right now," said Jeff Bachrach, HAP's board chair.

Romero has extensive public sector and non-profit experience in housing and supportive ser-

vices. She has served as an assistant program specialist for the city of Portland's Bureau of Housing and Community Development, community relations coordinator for the Portland Housing Center, and was chief of staff to Maria Rojo de Steffey, a Multnomah County Commissioner.

In these roles, she has been involved in policy decisions on critical supportive services to help keep people housed, provided education on homeownership, and crafted the communications

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