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U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, meets with the owners of Coast Industries during a northeast Portland visit with minority business representatives to discuss challenges they face in getting federal contracts. Pictured (from left) are Baruti Artharee, Bernadette Atharee, Wyden, and Hasan Artharee.

Contract Challenges Addressed

Oregon's senior U.S. senator recently met with representatives from about 30 local minority-owned businesses to discuss their frustrations getting government contracts.

Ron Wyden pointed out that no African American-

owned contractors got any lucrative federal government contracts last year. But he's hoping that this will change.

"If ever there was a history making time this is it," said Wyden, who explained that the atmosphere in the nation's capital was ready

to break with past practices.

He said that there is ample opportunity for minority businesses to get contracts in the federal economic stimulus law, and asserted that he would be working behind the scenes to make it happen.

The audience complained that they aren't given enough notice that the contracts are available, and often can't compete with much larger firms.

"We need support to find some other way to skin a cat," said one participant.

Melding Western and Eastern Tastes

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to sweets chocked full of sugar and fat. Instead, he explained, they like lots of fresh fruit in their pastries, which seems to please everyone.

Tucked away in a cluster of Asian-oriented businesses at Southeast 86th Avenue and Division Street, guests are greeted with racks of exotic looking sweets like red bean

buns, and various tarts made of egg or coconut, in addition to western staples like sponge cake. Visitors can also get stir fry, or satiate their caffeine needs with an espresso.

"Everyone likes the cake," said Amy Xie, Gary's wife.

Since starting about a year ago, the business has steadily slogged along despite the poor economy, she said. The heavy snow days of last winter were a drain on the busi-

ness, and people are tightening their belts in more than one way. But the bakery still manages to lure in enough customers with pastries that are still fairly cheap, with many costing only about a dollar or two.

In addition to catering to the tastes of the bakery's Asian clientele, some of its more exotic items, like pork buns and cream cheese puffs, are selling well.

But the big thing that has helped keep the business afloat are wedding cakes. Gary Xie spent years honing his craft in bakeries in China, Brooklyn, and Oregon, and can skillfully shape a cake into about any image. He's made cakes that look like cartoon characters, soccer balls, and lotus flowers.

"He can make any kind of cake," said Amy Xie of her husband.

Doubling Down on Past Success

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to do with running Queen of Sheba these days," Gebrehiwot told the Portland Observer. "My brother Getachew is in charge there now."

Gebrehiwot brought his brother to Portland 16 years ago, along with his mother and other members of their family, as he put down roots here and his hard work be-

gan to pay off.

Born in Tigray, Ethiopia, he came to Portland by way of Addis Ababa, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Ore., where he was studying at Linn-Benton Community College. He continued his study of food

trades at Portland Commu-

property housing Dad's Oil at 102 N.E. Russell St. and build a new space there. He finally opened the new restaurant this summer.

While Queen of Sheba serves traditional Ethiopian faire, with beef, chicken, lamb and vegetables served

Bistro's faire. However, he stresses, "I'm not cooking primarily for other Africans. I want to give people here a chance to see what these dishes taste like."

Those who have tried it give the restaurant high grades.

"It's great," says Susan Bailey, who lives elsewhere in the Eliot neighborhood. She, her husband Mike and daughter Alexis visited the Bistro on opening night. "We ordered three different things, and they were all good," Bailey says.

The entrees include Mousaka, a traditional north African lamb stew; Babetie, a south African casserole with beef, sautéed onions, apricots, apples, raisins and toasted almonds; and Mashilil, beef with stuffed eggplant. Prices range from \$10 to \$15 per entrée. There are domestic as well as imported beers and wines.

Afrique's hours are 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday; and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday and Monday. For more information, call 503-943-6616. Come visit the Gebrehiwot empire in the making.

"I'm not cooking primarily for other Africans. I want to give people here a chance to see what these dishes taste like."

— Alem Gebrehiwot

nity College and Oregon State University.

Gebrehiwot acquired a lease on the Queen of Sheba storefront at 2413 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in 1991. It began as a specialty food and spice store with one table for on-premises consumption, gradually morphed into a restaurant, and eventually expanded into the space next door. However, he dreamed of having a space he actually owned.

Four years ago he began the process of assembling financing to purchase the

on injera bread; in contrast Afrique Bistro is Pan-African, featuring recipes from all over the continent. The recipes are classified as being from North, South, East or West Africa. (Bear in mind that the countries of Africa primarily delineate 19th-century European conquest, not the boundaries of the homelands of ethnic groups.)

Gebrehiwot says there are small "colonies" of Ghanaian and other west African immigrants in Portland, and that they have enjoyed the

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