



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Kammy Naidoo offers up the culinary traditions of South Africa's large Indian population at her food cart on the corner of Vancouver Avenue and Fremont Street.

Mum's Kitchen Flavors

continued ▲ from front

ries and seasoned rice -- was no exception.

Kammy Naidoo grew up in Port Shepstone, a coastal city in South African, where her father ran a kitchen in a hotel. After working a number of various jobs, she moved to Durban, where she and other family members continued the tradition.

"The way I cook is the way my parents did it," she explained. "This is the kind of food that they served. This is the kind of food that I know."

Mum's Kitchen serves up staples common at other Indian carts including curried chicken, chickpeas, potato samosas, lentils and other favorites.

But it's clear there is something different about what is served at Mum's, although it can be hard for someone familiar with the food to put their finger on it. The flatbread is more akin to a tortilla than what's served at other carts; the curries aren't as creamy, and there's something about the spices that are a bit different. Cumin and nutmeg, flavorings not used as much in more traditional Indian food, have a greater presence at Mum's Kitchen.

The cart also offers fare that you'd be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. During colder months,

customers can get "samp," a heavy South African comfort food of pinto beans and corn kernels, accompanied by curried chicken, giving it an Indian twist. Mum's also offers "roti rolls," which are essentially Indian burritos filled with curry or spicy chickpeas.

"She took a very complex cuisine and simplified it a bit," said Kas Naidoo of her mum's cooking.

"I don't think we really try to stand out," added her Kammy Naidoo. "We just did what we do best. We have foods that were true to our culture and our family history."

Kammy Naidoo came to Portland in 2008 to follow her daughter who had come to the city after a short stint in Cleveland, Ohio in 1999 as part of nanny program that aimed at fostering inter-cultural interaction.

She and her daughter, who also works as a chef and general manager for another company, wanted to open up a restaurant serving their unique food, but had a hard time accessing startup capital, and decided to settle for a food cart to get established.

They eventually secured a microloan to rent a food cart in the parking lot of a dry cleaner located on the corner of Vancouver Avenue and Fremont Street, and opened up in September of last

year. A few months later, they purchased their own no-frills cart in Eugene and hauled it up I-5 to the current spot.

"We didn't really know what we were getting into," said Kas Naidoo, who explained that food carts aren't common in South Africa, and they didn't fully realize the scope of Portland's food car culture until they became part of it. "We just saw it as an opportunity to establish our business, and once we got into it we realized that it's huge in Portland."

The Naidoos said that they had a hard time at first generating interest in their unique food, but people came by whose curiosity had been piqued by a sign advertising South African Indian food. People eating at the Mexican food cart next door also checked it out, and word steadily spread about Mum's Kitchen.

Business is doing well, according to both women. It's gotten favorable reviews on websites like foodcartsporeland.com and yelp.com, and received an award this past summer at the Deschutes Brewery street festival.

And the original long-term goal of opening a proper restaurant seems to be much closer.

"At the rate our business is expanding I think a restaurant is more of a short term goal than a long term goal," said Kas Naidoo.

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