

## South Korean helps Sounders win MLS Cup

### The Layup Drill



Courtesy of Sounders FC

Coach Brian Schmetzer raising the cup along with his team

By Jason Cruz  
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Welcome to another edition of The Layup Drill. In this edition,

see **SPORTS** on 16

## Keiro to be demolished, replaced by multi-use building, application shows

By Mahlon Meyer  
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

The Keiro Rehabilitation and Care Center (KRCC) has been sold to a Bellevue-based real estate company that plans to demolish the nursing home and construct a multi-use building in its place, according to the attorney for Keiro and an application obtained by the Northwest Asian Weekly.

“In order to cover the expenses of closing the facility and to support its remaining programs, Keiro has entered into a binding agreement with an unrelated party to sell the former KRCC property, located at 1601 East Yesler Way, at or above its appraised fair market value,” wrote David A. Lawson, an attorney at Davis Wright Tremaine LLP, in response to the more than half a dozen letters and emails sent to the attorney general.

In response to an email from Northwest Asian Weekly, Lawson added that “the deal has not yet closed,” meaning the money and property have



Keiro property on 1601 East Yesler Way

not yet changed ownership.

“In a typical real estate transaction, there are several weeks between the signing of a purchase and sale agreement, and the actual closing of the sale,” he wrote.

see **KEIRO** on 12

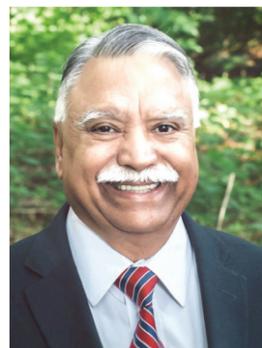


Photo from votesatpalsidhu.com

Satpal Sidhu

## Satpal Sidhu elected Whatcom County Executive

By Staff  
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Satpal Sidhu edged out Tony Larson to be Whatcom County’s next County Executive with 51 percent of the vote (Larson had 48 percent).

Sidhu wrote in a Nov. 9 email, “During this campaign, I had the opportunity to speak with thousands of people from all corners of the

county and listen to their concerns. It was a valuable learning experience and I will bring that with me to this office.”

Satpal grew up in India and worked in Canada before moving to Whatcom County in 1988. He and his wife Mundir, married for 40 years, have lived in Lynden for 30 years. They have three sons.

Satpal has been on the Whatcom County

Council since 2015. He speaks four languages, was a Fulbright Scholar, and has substantial experience as a professional engineer, senior business executive, and Dean of Engineering at Bellingham Technical College.

Satpal is also a founding member of the Meridian Public Schools Foundation and currently serves on the board of the Whatcom Community College Foundation. ■

## Tết founders inspired to foster community through Tết in Seattle



Linh Thai



Minh-Duc Nguyen



Sinh Tran



Quang Pham

By Kai Curry  
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

The founders of Tết in Seattle had a dream. To complement multiple city- and region-wide Tết celebrations, they wanted one large annual festival at the Seattle Center. In 1997, this dream

became a reality when, in partnership with Seattle Center Festál, the first Tết in Seattle event took place.

Tết in Seattle founders, representatives from four organizations—the Vietnamese Student Association at the

see **TÉT** on 13

## Phamily business

### Pho Bac sibling entrepreneurs on their family’s legacy, moving forward, and mental health

By Stacy Nguyen  
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Some years ago, Khoa Pham was battling this sense of complacency. He was working in his family’s business, Pho Bac, a local chain of Vietnamese restaurants that focuses on Vietnam’s most recognizable food. He was doing the same things that he remembered his parents doing when he was a child.

He’d come into work and got ticked over what he viewed as “things going to shit.”

“I was like, ‘Why is this thing broken, and why did no one call me about it? Where’s the receipt for this?’”

“It is easy to lose focus when you have a lot going on around you,” he said.

“Complacency was a big thing,” Yenvy added. “There was no purpose. We were coasting.”

So Khoa approached Yenvy and another one



Photo by Stacy Nguyen

The Pham siblings, who own and operate their family’s Pho Bac restaurants. From left: Yenvy Pham, Quynh-Vy Pham, and Khoa Pham.

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**PHO BAC from 1**

of his sisters, Quynh-Vy. He told them that the surrounding Little Saigon neighborhood has changed a lot over the years. He asked them what they thought about remodeling one of their restaurants.

His sisters both said, “Okay.”

**Beginnings**

Pho Bac was founded in 1982 by Theresa Cat Vu and Augustine Nien Pham, who arrived in the States just a year prior, in October of 1981. It was the first time Theresa and Augustine experienced a winter that was cold.

Theresa and Augustine were already married, already a family, and living in what was then Saigon. They had a little coffee shop together that was frequented by members of the military. It was this experience that they took with them after they fled Vietnam, bided time in a Phillipine refugee camp, and then landed in Seattle.

In the beginning—to get by, Augustine worked at A La Francaise, a bakery in Pike Place Market that has since closed. Theresa worked as a seamstress and also in a sandwich shop—not making banh mi, the Vietnamese sandwiches that she grew up with, but making American submarine sandwiches.

It took them a year to both realize that they really did not like working for other people. They remembered how it felt—the autonomy and the control they had—when they had their coffee shop in Saigon.

Theresa liked to throw parties—big ones that pulled in the entire community, which at that time in the early 1980s in Seattle, was small and tight-knit.

“She’s very inventive, a mass feeder,” said Yenvy.

Theresa and Augustine parlayed their strengths into a business. They eyed a building—what is now famously known as “the boat”—a tight nautical-shaped building in the apex of a triangular lot on the corner of South Jackson Street and Rainier Avenue South.

Before the boat was *the* boat, it was an insurance office. Upon taking over the space—which had no real kitchen—Theresa and Augustine pragmatically decided to lean on what they thought was their new strength and new history: they opened an American submarine shop. It turned out, they didn’t go back far enough.

“On weekends, Vietnamese people would come over after church and say, ‘I miss pho,’” said Khoa.

So pragmatically—because it was what their people were asking for—the couple started offering pho.

At the time, the surrounding area was really blue collar—mixed. Theresa and Augustine had their share of Vietnamese customers, sure, but they also had their constituent of American-born customers. These customers saw the Vietnamese customers ordering just the soup and not subs, so the American-borns started requesting pho, too. “The building was very small,” said Quynh-Vy.

“The kitchen was so tight,” said Khoa. “It wasn’t built as a kitchen, so they would make pho at home, and they would bring it up every day.”

**Second gen leadership**

Khoa, Yenvy, and Quynh-Vy now actively run the family business. All three have the same personality type: They are all very opinionated and vocal in opinion-giving—but they also are not passive aggressive or too prideful. Their communication style involves yelling at each other—and then getting over it.

They all also tend to be ‘ideas’ people—ideas are easy to come by for them, and they have huge ones—it is execution that they stumble in.

“We’re so laid back,” Khoa says, smil-

ing. “We like to kick it a lot. There’s no sense of *urgency* sometimes. Sometimes [to my sisters], I’m like, ‘Hey man, let’s get this going here.’”

The remodel of the Jackson Street location of Pho Bac was the hardest project they ever did together. Khoa thinks that their ambition got in the way—they wanted to do so much but sometimes when they got the thing they thought they wanted, they had a hard time committing to it—or it just didn’t work. Yenvy said that at one point, they had an espresso machine that was labor intensive as hell. That expensive machine was scratched after three months.

“We’re good at cutting our losses fast,” said Khoa.

The output of all their trial and error is a restaurant that opened on New Years, 2018. They opened somewhat impulsively—just because they felt like it was time. They placed an ad requesting that servers show up on that day and at a specified time. Eleven servers showed up.

And then customers showed up—and kept showing up, even though the three didn’t officially announce that they were open for business. They were slammed, and it was hectic and stressful. Their point of sales machine wasn’t even working. By 9 p.m., they were exhausted and decided to just close up—and not work the next day.

In the course of turning off the open sign, they figured out that they had never even turned *on* the open sign to begin with. Their customers just organically found them.

That night was kind of prophetic. Because they have been busy ever since. Because Pho Bac Sup Shop gets write-ups in local and national media all the time. Because now they regularly get double the amount of customers that exhausted them to closure on that first night.

**Lessons**

Four months before they opened Pho Bac Sup Shop—and a long while before that—Yenvy was struggling. Emotionally and psychologically, she took a dip four months before opening. During construction and remodeling, though, she was hypomanic.

“I was *nuts*,” she explained efficiently. “I was not focused, I kind of felt this superiority over everything—transcending emotions and time and space. I had this God complex.”

And her dip was the complete opposite of that. It was a void of nothingness.

“I didn’t feel anything,” she said. “And I didn’t know what was wrong. But I was *very* vocal that something was wrong with me. I had this huge guilt all the time for not contributing enough—I didn’t want to get out of bed. I was like, ‘What the f\*\*\* am I doing?’ It was Thanksgiving. I went to Whistler. I hit rock bottom. I just didn’t move. I just cried all the time. It was intense. And at the same time, I was opening this restaurant.”

So Yenvy went to a psychiatrist, the same one that her mom went to. There, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which is something both her mom and Khoa has.

The process of finding the right medication mix was slow for her—it took time to test the efficacy of different medications. She was depressed when Pho Bac Sup Shop opened—and anxious, which she thought was strange because she typically had not suffered from anxiety or insecurities in the past.

There were days she could not get up, so there were days she didn’t come into work. There were also days when she did work at the new restaurant, but didn’t talk to anyone at all.

“I was faking it until I made it,” said Yenvy. “Without doing that, I would’ve been depressed longer. I would’ve dwelled in my own self-pity. With Sup Shop opening during that time, it really pushed my boundaries in dealing with mental illness.”

It took a few months for her to start feeling better—around April 2018.

**How-to**

Theresa and Augustine have five kids who are all now in their 30s and 40s. Theresa and Augustine, with their Western names, gave all their kids Vietnamese names: Yenvy (Yen-Vy), Khoa, Quynh-Vy, Tu-Vy, and Vy.

Their kids say they were born into this—born into the restaurant life. Their house was filled with restaurant supplies when they were growing up. Their toys were boxes of dried pho noodles, boxes that they made houses and fortresses out of.

Ironically, Vy and Tu-Vy, the two that probably put in the most hours at the restaurant growing up, ended up finding and being accomplished in their respective careers outside of the family business.

It was Yenvy, Khoa, and Quynh-Vy who ended up staying in it. Their dispositions—their big ideas, fiery personalities, impulsivity, the spurts of huge productivity coupled with lulls of chill lack of urgency—lends itself to huge creativity. They, like their parents, are serial entrepreneurs.

They all have multiple projects running—personal projects, side projects. Some of these projects they are keeping close to the vest, probably letting them bake for a little longer before disclosing. They are working toward centralizing the production of their pho, for one, to be able to expand their family business even further and possibly open more locations. They are also looking at different sectors, not just food and hospitality. Yenvy is looking at nonprofit, maybe philanthropy. There might be something related to coffee in the works as well as activating a creative space.

“It never stops,” said Quynh-Vy.

The three can be really relaxed about their own successes, shrugging it off. They all dwell in the belief of doing versus talking or pontificating. They all like to solve prob-

lems. They work well as a unit, playing to their different strengths. Khoa looks after the overall business and the creative focus of their brand. Yenvy and Quynh-Vy face outwardly more—they are people persons—they are also executors who get things done.

Yenvy handles staffing, because Khoa has a hard time firing people.

“I hate firing people!” he said. “Yenvy can fire people left and right, on the spot. But I will be thinking about it all day, writing it down, articulating how am I going to tell people that I have to let them go.”

Because they are sometimes shaky in planning and preparation, they happen to be really great at improvising and rolling with the punches, which they have found to be a strength in their work—both their restaurant work and community work.

“People should have fun in work!” said Yenvy, when pressed to give advice to people starting out in entrepreneurship. “Don’t work 24/7. Don’t take things to heart. Things happen all the time. Just find solutions and move on! Don’t be a whiner! Don’t bitch! Be flexible!”

Khoa and Quynh-Vy have finance degrees. Yenvy has degrees in economics and Spanish. Khoa does not think that a college degree necessarily matters that much in entrepreneurship.

“Don’t talk about it—just do it,” he said. “Just stop talking. Just do it. Just make a decision—and just *try* it. You can go make a thousand lists of ideas, but it doesn’t matter if you’re not doing. Just take steps towards progress.” ■

*Learn more about Pho Bac at [thephobac.com](http://thephobac.com). The Pham siblings are also among our 2019 Top Contributors honorees, celebrated at a dinner on Dec. 6. Buy tickets at [topcontributors2019.bpt.me](http://topcontributors2019.bpt.me).*

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