

Sidelined by protests, abandoned by police, AAPI businesses yearn for return of safety



Photo by Assunta Ng

U:Don Fresh Japanese Noodle Station

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Sometimes the sentries outside the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP) zone would let him in. Other times, they'd question him.

Now that the police have reclaimed the area,

Tak Kurachi still can't get customers to come. The area is still blockaded.

"It's like an exchange of hands," said Kurachi, 41, owner of U:Don Fresh Japanese Noodle Station, in a telephone interview.

see CAPITOL HILL on 8

Man goes on racist rant against Asian family dining at restaurant

A video of a man racially abusing diners at a restaurant in Carmel Valley, California over the holiday weekend has gone viral after it was retweeted by "The Voice" judge Kelly Clarkson. Jordan Chan originally shared the video on Instagram on July 6, showing the man cursing and gesturing with his middle finger at the family at the Bernardus Lodge and Spa's Lucia restaurant.

Chan said the man "relentlessly harassed" her family while they were celebrating her aunt's birthday.

"Trump's gonna f*** you! You f***ers need to leave... f***ing Asian piece of s**t," the man is heard saying to Chan's family in the clip.

A waitress at the restaurant is seen stepping in and ordering the man to leave.

"You do not talk to our guests like that. Get out now," she is heard saying. "They are valued guests. You are not allowed here ever again."

Chan said, "I've dealt with racism as well, but never on that scale. Never on that level to the point



Image from Jordan Chan's Instagram account

where somebody completely unprovoked felt

see RACIST RANT on 9

Robin Leong honors fatherhood and Chinese tradition with a new children's book

By Kai Curry
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

He's been known as that handsome star from Singapore's Triple Nine and the son of Seattle's own Grandmaster John S. S. Leong. But what is foremost on Robin Leong's mind these days is being a dad.

"Becoming a father, my priorities changed," Leong told the Northwest Asian Weekly. "Everything I do now is for my kids, and that's not a bad thing—that's a great thing. I love fatherhood. I think I was born to be a father."

With fatherhood as inspiration, Leong has written a children's book, *The Kung Fu Force and the Tower of Doom*, published by Epigram Books. The book, which will be part of a series,

see LEONG on 12



Photo courtesy of Epigram Books

Robin Leong with his sons Lucas and Brady.

Kodama's job saved

Bellevue College's Interim President Gary Locke has approved a one-time allocation from the president's discretionary account to 91.3 KBCS-FM, and save the jobs of the News Director and Program Director.

KBCS is affiliated with Bellevue College, and the college's Board of Trustees holds the broadcast license for the radio station.

Supporters of Yuko Kodama had started an online petition to save her job as News and Public Affairs Director. Her contract was set to expire on June 30.

The petition on Change.org said, "Yuko is a critical voice in our local media market ... Her stories, along with those of her volunteer/student news



Yuko Kodama

team often focus on the most underserved populations in our

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“It was like the police were in charge, then it was CHOP, now it’s back to the police,” he added. “Until the street in front of us is completely cleared, I can’t imagine us getting back to normal.”

Now, however, the police have dispersed and regular traffic resumed, “which has been a huge relief,” he said.

Just such turnarounds are typical of the experience of the few Asian and Asian American owned businesses that are still open after the desolation of the last month involving protests spiraling out of control, police brutality and abandonment, and the desecration of public property.

Most of roughly a dozen Asian and Asian American owned businesses in the area were still shuttered after the month of turmoil. Many did not answer phones and listed closures on their websites.

While Kurachi and others were relieved to have the police back, the long-lasting scars of the abandonment may never be healed, according to an attorney for businesses in the area that is suing the city in a class-action lawsuit.

“The damage done has a variety of impacts and will continue,” said Patty Eakes, the attorney. “They were so frustrated, they’d reached out daily and nobody listened.”

Kurachi said protesters would occasionally come into his shop and demand food.

“I would say you have to pay for it,” he said.

But they would insist, arguing they had bought something from him to drink earlier so he was obliged to provide food.

“So I gave them what they wanted,” he said.

Other forms of violence were experienced by Asian businesspeople as casual and random.

At Baitong Thai Street Cafe, an eatery that serves Thai style street food, such as boat noodles—named because they were served on boats in Thailand 200 years ago—and crispy fried pork belly over rice, a gang of street goers casually smashed all the windows.

It was 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning, and a group of half a dozen young men passed by.

“They just wanted to have fun, they were just holding a stick and bam bam bam, they hit the windows all across the front,” said Kay Mangmati, the manager.

Mangmati and her co-worker Sita Chucy saw the violence on a recorded video.

“It’s like they were saying, ‘I don’t have anything better to do, so I just want to smash your windows,’” she said.

Now that police have reclaimed the area, they still have to work out of a boarded up window. They could not get replacement windows during the protests. They still can’t.

“We ordered them many weeks ago, and we were told it will still be many weeks before we get them,” said Mangmati.

The restaurant workers take turns sneaking out the back door of the eatery.



Windows of the Seattle Police Department’s East Precinct on 12th Avenue and Pine are boarded up.

And even though the main protests have ended, the crowds still surging in the area immediately outside of the former CHOP zone make it unsafe for them to get to work.

Worried about the spread of the coronavirus, which seems exacerbated by the chaos and crowds that still seem to reign over the adjacent areas, Chucy is still taking an Uber to work.

Before the protests, it cost her \$6 one-way. Now, with the memories of the danger still present, the drivers are still charging the same rates they charged during the height of the CHOP activism.

That means Chucy, who arrived from Thailand 6 years ago, and works only five hours a day, because her boss is portioning out hours among employees, must pay between \$8 and \$12 for a ride.

Workers in both restaurants felt abandoned by the police. They said they had never seen anything like it. The abandonment of the East Precinct and the ceding of the area to protesters seemed pre-planned, said Kurachi, whose store is directly across from the police station.

“Two days before they left, they were already putting up barriers at the block entries on 12th Ave and Pine around and boarding up the precinct windows. As soon as that work was finished, they up and left.”

“It’s disturbing, being abandoned by law enforcement and the city, feeding these guys with food, barriers, whatever they needed,” he added, referring to the city’s enabling efforts for the CHOP zone.

At the end of the two days of preparation, Kurachi saw busses pull up and the officers and state troopers file on.

When his landlord called for more information, he was informed the police were leaving the area.

“And we got this ominous quote from the police, ‘you guys are on your own,’” he said.

Mangmati and Chucy were equally surprised by the departure of law enforcement.

“When we saw the army arrive, we thought maybe they would come and take care of us,” said Mangmati, referring to the National Guard. “And then they left, and after that I saw that they and the police were just gone. We’ve never seen anything like this in Thailand.”

Overall, though, both businesses hope revenue will pick up now.

For Kurachi, who opened his

first shop in the University District in 2011 and his shop on Capitol Hill four years later, maintaining his business during the crisis was difficult.

Every day, he personally drove cleaning and food supplies, including towels, soaps, take out containers and food ingredients, between his shop on University Avenue and his newer one on Capitol Hill.

“Some of our vendors stopped delivering, they couldn’t get through,” he said. “I had to park my car just outside the CHOP and wheel it all in on a cart.”

During the months leading up to the protests, his business had already dropped 70% to 80% due to the coronavirus pandemic. When he ramped up take out and delivery, it leveled off to a 50% drop.

When the city allowed CHOP to fill the streets around his shop, his business nosedived again to at least 75% of normal.

“Now we’re just running on fumes.”

Kurachi said he ran through



Makeshift memorial for people who have died during George Floyd protests, or in cities where protests happened.



Community garden created near Cal Anderson Park.

Photos by Assunta Ng

all of his saved up cash, and he is waiting for the police to open up the streets outside his shop.

Baitong Thai saw a drop of 40% due to the pandemic, and then a further drop of 30% during the CHOP activism.

Restaurant owners in the International District told the Northwest Asian Weekly that the recent activity hurt their businesses also, due to their drivers being unable to deliver to customers in and

around the CHOP zone.

All of them are eager for a return to normalcy. Each of them recounted hearing frequent gunshots, fighting and seeing acts of violence and vandalism.

“We are so happy to see the police nowadays,” said Mangmati. ■

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