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Farm fresh

Produce shop boasts of quality

BUSINESS | A12



The sushi counter at the new Farm Boy store.



Courtesy photos

Producing second shop

Sherman Oaks business opens Chino Hills site

By Diana Sholley
Staff Writer

At 2 a.m., while most people are sleeping, Rick O is working hard on his American dream.

He's already up, dressed and searching through the endless bushels of fresh fruits and vegetables that the best quality Los Angeles wholesalers have to offer.

It's got to be the best for this independent grocer — he's got too much competition to settle for anything less.

O, his wife, Kim, and their son, Mark, own Farm Boy, a small produce and specialty store. After a successful 10-year run at its original Sherman Oaks location, last month the family opened a second Farm Boy at The Shoppes at Chino Hills.

"My dad has always been a very hard worker," said Mark, the family spokesman. "He was in the construction business when a friend of his told him about the produce business. My dad liked what he heard. He figured everyone has to eat."

Rick O, who like his mother is Korean born, learned about the business and how to choose produce the hard way — on-the-job training and

The 4-1-1

FARM BOY

Where: The Shoppes at Chino Hills, 13920 City Center Drive

Hours: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily

Information: (909) 902-5567

trial and error.

Rick O was a quick study, and it didn't take long for Farm Boy in Sherman Oaks to take off. The steady flow of loyal customers combined with word-of-mouth ad-

vertising have been key to Farm Boy's success.

Through the years, the O family developed items, services and strategies that distinguished their store from the rest of the specialty grocery stores.

Upon entering, customers are greeted by buckets of colorful fresh flowers chosen by staff from the Los Angeles Flower Market. In the front half of the store, shoppers can take a break and grab some self-serve frozen yogurt, homemade Miso soup or a variety of steamed rice.

One of the store's unique offerings is its sushi bar, where a chef creates restaurant quality sushi daily.

Fruits, vegetables and a variety of nuts are in the back of the store. Farm Boy sells no meat or dairy.

Before the economy was in such distress, the O family decided to expand their enterprise. They

After 10 years in Sherman Oaks, produce seller Farm Boy has opened another store at The Shoppes at Chino Hills.

checked out The Shoppes at Chino Hills and liked what they saw.

"It's a new area and a growing community," Mark said about the Chino Hills area. "The people are friendly and we thought they would appreciate not having to go into L.A. for quality produce."

While nervous about the economy, the family has faith that the new store's quality, offerings, customer service and homey atmosphere will build a customer base similar to their Sherman Oaks location.

"When you come into our store, we want you to feel comfortable, like you're coming to a friend's home," Mark said.

To help achieve that aura, the employees are either family or long-time friends who have learned the business and understand the O family's work ethic and philosophy.

Opening new businesses is nothing new, even in a weak economy, said Tarique Hossain, an assistant professor in international business and marketing at Ca Poly Pomona.

"Businesses open because they believe they either have something people want or can do business better than their competitors," Hossain said. "There is still a segment of the community that is still spending."

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