



UNIVERSITY OF GUAM
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
& PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MAKING WAVES

2023 | MOVING MICRONESIA



ABOUT GUAM

Guam is a small island located 13°N 144°E and is the largest and southernmost island in the Northern Marianas Island chain in the Pacific Ocean. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Guam's population is roughly 153,836, and residents are dispersed throughout its 19 villages. There are currently three military bases in Guam housing three different military branches – Anderson Air Force Base (Air Force) and Camp Blaz (US Marines) are located on the northern tip of Guam. In contrast, Naval Base Guam is located near the southern part of Guam. Roughly 21,700 US military personnel and families reside in Guam; however, that number is estimated to be larger since there has recently been a more concerted effort to transfer Marines from Okinawa to Guam. Guam is a melting pot of ethnicities which include Guam's indigenous population of CHamoru (37%), Filipino (26%), Caucasian (7%), Chuukese (7%), Korean (2%), other Pacific Island (2%), other Asian (2%), Chinese (2%), Palauan (2%), Japanese (1%), Pohnpeian (1%) and other mixed ethnicities (10%).

ABOUT MICRONESIA

Micronesia is a region in Oceania that comprises 2100 islands, more than 600 of which are a part of the Federated States of Micronesia. The Federated States of Micronesia is comprised of 4 states: Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap, and Kosrae. The total population of the Federated States of Micronesia is approximately 115,000, with the largest island, Pohnpei, having a population of around 36,000. The Federated States of Micronesia has a diverse population with various ethnic groups, including the Chuukese, Pohnpeians, Yapese, Kosraeans, and others. The official languages of the Federated States of Micronesia are English, Chuukese, Kosraean, Pohnpeian, and Yapese. The economy of the Federated States of Micronesia is primarily based on subsistence agriculture and fishing, with tourism and the export of marine resources also playing a role in the economy. The Federated States of Micronesia is a unique and diverse region with a rich cultural heritage and unique natural beauty.

ABOUT THE REPORT

The University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration (PMBA) Program Cohort XVIII has produced the second volume of the Making Waves Case Study Report featuring businesses in Guam, U.S.A. and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) in the Western Pacific region. This is the second in an ongoing compilation of reports that will continue to bring educators and students around the world - the stories of entrepreneurs from the Asia-Pacific region.

The report highlights the universality of the entrepreneur's persistent and untiring spirit and the rewards for their hard work. The teaching cases featured in this issue show how businesses address various challenges, including economic, environmental, and cultural dynamics, competitive pressures in the market, attracting and retaining talent, establishing brand reputation, and accommodating new customer bases, and pivoting while operating in a new normal, post-COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION	1
OPAKE <i>Graffiti for the Greater Good</i>	3
THE LOCAL SHOP <i>One Stop CHamoru Shop</i>	7
BRDFRT CO. <i>Putting Micronesia on Your Back</i>	11
BEYOND THE BARBELL <i>Unified Fit's Holistic Approach to Fitness</i>	15
PASSION INSPIRES PURPOSE <i>The Emergence of ATOS Jiu-Jitsu Guam</i>	19
STAX <i>The Perfect Combo of Character, Creativity, and Community</i>	23
SAKURA NOODLE HOUSE <i>Rebellion, Determination, and an Ever-Evolving Legacy</i>	27
MOSA'S JOINT <i>Where Employees are the Secret Ingredient</i>	31
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	34

OPAKE

GRAFFITI FOR THE GREATER GOOD

This case study discusses the journey of Opake, a small urban art and skate shop in Guam that began with a mission to elevate the perception of graffiti art. The store has evolved and expanded its offerings to include unique and trendy streetwear. This case demonstrates how a unique brand identity not only helps businesses keep up with the competition but also allows them to carve their own path to stay ahead of the game.

REPAINTING PERSPECTIVES

In 2012, when co-owners Ed “Lerk” Gaza and Jonathan “Joser” Jose first opened Opake in Guam’s northern village of Dededo, they knew there was much work ahead to redefine and dispel preconceived notions surrounding graffiti in Guam. Opake was dedicated to transforming hearts and minds about the future of graffiti as an artistic medium instead of its former roots of vandalism. The Opake crew worked with the Guam Police Department and various public schools to educate the local community on the use of aerosol paint for artistic expression and to inspire the youth to combat vandalism. Over the years, Lerk, Joser, and numerous urban artists in Guam began to witness a growing prominence and acceptance of graffiti art, ultimately reaching mainstream status.

For Lerk and Joser, Opake is the perfect blend of their passion for graffiti art, love for skateboarding, and their combined desire to make a difference. With Lerk’s background as a graffiti artist and Joser’s expertise in retail and skateboarding, the co-owners shared a vision to create a homegrown brand that would bridge these worlds together. From its humble beginnings as an art-based shop, Opake expanded its offerings from skateboarding goods and spray paint to include unique and trendy apparel. Despite

its relatively small size, Opake has managed to establish a strong reputation in the local community and attract a loyal customer base.

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WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

One of the main challenges faced by Opake is the highly competitive nature of the retail industry. Guam is home to several big-box retailers and global fashion brands, making it difficult for a small independent store like Opake to stand out. To meet this challenge, Opake focused on creating a unique and distinct brand identity. In Guam, the retail industry relies heavily on building relationships with its customers, and for Opake, these relationships are built through the stories behind their products. Since its inception, Opake had a mission to elevate—at first, to overturn the negative stigma surrounding graffiti art. Now, Opake has internalized this mission into their branding. Beginning with the business name Opake, Lerk and Joser were inspired by the word “opaque,” which often means non-transparent in art; however, to the Opake crew, the word represented a mantra for their business: “This is who we are—as is. No pretending. What you see is what you get.” This come-as-you-are attitude is what fuels the mission and purpose of Opake—to elevate something from a



formerly negative perception to something that can be positive and create a space for it to thrive.

ERASING THE MIDDLEMEN

To maintain the authenticity of their products, Opake has effectively removed intermediaries from their supply chain. The concepts and designs for their apparel are developed and printed in-house. As artists, Lerk and Joser see their products not only as mere articles of clothing but also pieces of art—their art—and share it with the local community. “We’re artists, so we can do the art. And what we see in our minds, we can bring it into the computers and then from there, transfer it into the shirts,” adds Lerk about their in-house process. By completing their production in-house, Opake has more control over the quality and design of their merchandise while reducing the costs associated with outsourcing to third-party suppliers. These advantages enable the shop to offer unique and high-quality products to their customers. The Opake owners knew that the upfront cost of having their own production facility would prove to be a sound long-term investment in contrast to reliance on third party suppliers. “Especially when it comes to things like art, if you want it done right, you have to try to do it yourself,” Joser adds. This approach also ensures that Opake maintains a more sustainable and ethical supply chain, which is becoming increasingly important to consumers. By cutting out the middlemen, the shop can focus on producing quality products that align with their brand values and meet the demands of their customers.

STAYING DOPE AND RELEVANT

Riding the wave of creativity and carving out a unique path, Opake stays ahead of the pack with their bold and innovative strategies. With their newly established clothing line, Opake seeks to always stay relevant by printing designs that resonate with the community. “I think one of the best things we do is being relatable,” Joser adds. “The products we put out resonate with people.” Opake’s designs revolve

around the everyday “anythings” which people in Guam are familiar with, from featuring *finadenne*, a staple vinegar and soy-based condiment, and Spam musubis, a popular snack in the tradition of Japanese onigiri, to shopping at the local grocery store. Opake has continued this strategy by collaborating with local artists and designers. The store also never makes the same design twice, regularly featuring limited-edition clothing and accessories designed by local creatives. This strategy not only helps to promote local talent but also makes Opake more appealing to customers who value uniqueness and authenticity.

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NO COPYING AND PASTING

In a highly saturated retail market—from local t-shirt printing shops and chain stores to pop-up shops and online retailers, Opake faces the unique challenge of being a first mover. Typically, being the first mover gives the shop a competitive advantage by establishing its brand as innovative and trendsetting. However, with their uncommon approach of in-house production and unique designs by local creatives, Opake is confronted with competitors who can quickly replicate and improve upon the designs. When the Opake crew quickly learned how easy it was for their competitors to copy their designs, the owners made it their production mantra to release only limited-edition designs, launching only a set number of shirts and refraining from printing any of the released designs more than once. “The designs that we make are organic—we don’t copy and paste,” Lerk adds. “There’s a lot of thought that goes into what

we make, and every design has a story.” Opake relies on its deep understanding of its target audience and their preferences and has focused on building a strong brand identity and establishing a loyal customer base, helping to mitigate the risks associated with being a first mover in a highly competitive industry. With this strategy, Opake is not just keeping up with the competition, they are carving their own path to stay ahead of the game.

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BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

Opake’s brand identity and established loyal customer base stem from their continued mission to inspire the community. Since its humble beginnings, Opake has partnered with community organizations for graffiti art education, skateboarding events, and island beautification. Through these partnerships, Opake continues to provide a space for youth to follow their passions in art and skateboarding—helping these younger communities to dedicate their time and channel their energy to things that they love. By collaborating with local skate groups and artists, the shop has created a sense of belonging and inclusivity that resonates with their target market. The Opake crew was proud to partner with *Mañelu*, a local non-profit organization, to serve troubled youth through graffiti art clinics, teaching them about the responsible use of spray paint and creating beautiful graffiti art. They were also instrumental in the Guam Police Department’s anti-vandalism education efforts, a part of the Department’s CrimeStoppers program.

Through partnerships with community organizations, Opake has built a reputation as a socially responsible business that supports local initiatives and values. By engaging with the community and showcasing their unique perspective through their clothing designs, the shop has created a strong and loyal following that connects with the brand on a personal level. Such partnerships have helped Opake continue its legacy of creating an authentic brand identity and standing out in a crowded marketplace while making significant contributions to the island community.

THE FUTURE IS A BLANK CANVAS

Beyond its current success, Opake aims to paint an even brighter future with the expansion of their production facility and product offerings. Opake hopes to become a one-stop shop for other businesses looking to build their brands. With a strong brand under their belt and the momentum they have maintained, the Opake crew can help breathe the same life and passion they have nurtured over the years into new ideas that can help other businesses and the community thrive.

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This case study was written by Christian F. Valencia, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.

THE LOCAL SHOP

ONE STOP CHAMORU SHOP

Anthony “Tony” Sayama is passionate about bringing the CHamoru culture to the next generation, and, to those who miss Guam. Tony owns a small store located in Hagatna, Guam’s capital city, at the Agana Shopping Center. The “Local Shop” aims to create a unique shopping experience. The “Local Shop” showcases opportunities to learn about the CHamoru people and Guam’s legends. Tony is also the founder of Guam Peeps. Guam Peeps produces produces dolls, flashcards, books, and other cultural items of CHamoru legends.

“HIS”TORY

Anthony “Tony” Sayama, a small local business owner, has always been passionate about the CHamoru culture. After being injured in war while serving in the military, he realized there was no place like home. Anthony had always longed to create his own business showcasing the island of Guam. While the injury served as a significant obstacle, it motivated him to bring the CHamoru culture to the next generation. Being away from home made Tony realize how much he valued his culture and island. He recognized that his children, like many in their generation, were missing valuable parts of the CHamoru culture, such as language and customs. The Fino’ CHamoru language is nearly extinct. The 2000 U.S. Census showed that fewer than 20% of CHamorus living in Guam speak the CHamoru language fluently. In Guam, the language suffered due to the suppression of the colonizers. Through his approach, Tony wanted to showcase the ancient myths of Guam’s legends while incorporating the language and keeping the CHamoru culture strong. The idea started with a storyboard of characters like the *Taotaomo’na*, *Sirena*, *Duendes*, and the Chiefs - CHamoru mythological characters. The prototypes were made of wood, inspired by Funko Pops, and later produced as stuffed

dolls. As the business expanded, Guam Peeps also created flashcards, books, and sets for their dolls. Tony makes each doll with careful consideration so as to not distort the historic aspect. Incorporating his own identity and creativity, the *Taotaomo’na* doll has a cut on its abdomen, resembling Tony’s injury in battle.

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TĀYA’ COMPETITION

Tony does not aim to compete with other local vendors who are also seeking to perpetuate the CHamoru culture. Instead, the Local Shop offers its store for the consignment of other local artisans so that they too can have a storefront. Tony also offers his hand to up-and-coming local entrepreneurs. Tony believes that any vendor seeking to keep the CHamoru culture strong is an ally, not a threat. Although Guam Peeps are not the only dolls on the island of Guam, Guam Peep’s legends have also been validated by scholars of CHamoru studies such as former University of Guam professor, Dr. Michael Bevacqua. During the conception of Guam Peeps, Tony met with Dr. Bevacqua to ensure that the stories of the Guam Peeps’ legends were accurate.

One major obstacle Tony had to overcome was the COVID-19 pandemic. During the early stages of Guam Peeps, his business was primarily conducted at pop-up shops throughout the island. The Sayama family would apply a divide and conquer approach



HAFA ADAI



Official GUMA STORE
GUMA
GUAM OFFICIAL MERCHANDISE & STORE

HAFA
ADA I



to island events such as village festivals, concerts, and flea markets to showcase their brand. However, the COVID-19 pandemic halted all festivals, forcing Tony to search for a new source of income to keep his business afloat. Luckily, the “Choose to Reuse” law took effect in January 2020. Guam needed to adjust to utilizing reusable bags. Tony ultimately resorted to designing locally inspired reusable bags for Guam’s only grocery store chain, Payless Supermarkets. The distribution of reusable bags and facemasks helped push Guam Peeps to the next level, where they not only kept afloat through the pandemic but were also able to start their “Local Shop.”

One foreseeable challenge according to Tony is the perception of local legends and the veracity of Tony’s renditions. Guam Peeps has faced challenges from critics who have different perceptions of mythological characters. Tony mentions that the effort that goes into conceptualizing a character is lengthy, and he is often pressured to add new characters to his line. However, he must balance consumer demands while ensuring an accurate depiction and historical background. While this impacts profitability, Tony only releases products once they have been validated by facts and verified by reliable sources.

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“Tony believes that any vendor seeking to keep the CHamoru culture strong is an ally, not a threat.”

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GROWING FAMILIA

Guam Peeps continues to remain true to its goal of perpetuating the local culture and is looking to grow with the introduction of additional characters and a new line of products. Tony would love to

eventually bring the characters to life by producing a cartoon with both CHamoru and English options. This way, the primary school children can feel more connected to the characters. Another planned expansion is to create puppets for CHamoru classes, which can promote more interaction during the language learning phase. Tony envisions that the puppets will come with flashcards so that children can practice interactively. As a means of giving back, Tony also donates his products to the CHamoru classes as well as his time by often serving as a guest speaker about CHamoru legends. Tony stays involved in the community by connecting with the public school CHamoru curriculum because the next generation inspires his artistic endeavors and keeps his brand alive.

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THE REAL GOALS

Another way that Tony stays involved in the community is by helping other local entrepreneurs flourish. One example of Tony’s mentorship is by helping create business plans and financial statements for young entrepreneurs. Tony also mentioned that he has applied for grants for new entrepreneurs looking for a way to get started on their businesses. Also, not only does the “Local Shop” help entrepreneurs, but Tony has also created an Instagram page called “Guam Funny Memes,” highlighting Guam’s untapped talent and island humor. Tony believes Guam has many talented artisans who simply need a platform

to showcase their brilliance. Through this platform, Tony can share the products of Guam’s developing artisan base to a greater audience, without costing them a single cent.

PASSION PROJECT

The Sayamas’ mission for their company is to not just be a profit-focused company. Instead, they are growing to provide the subsequent generation access to the CHamoru culture. Tony mentions that his store plans on expanding with the main goal of allowing more of his fellow local vendors to have a platform to sell their products. This would give an added boost to local artisans so that they can keep creating and sustaining their families and livelihoods. While Guam Peeps does have an online store, Tony wants to keep his brick-and-mortar store so that he can continue to see firsthand how he is living up to his goals.

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This case study was written by Camarin E. Cabral, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.

BRDFRT CO.

PUTTING MICRONESIA ON YOUR BACK

This case is about BRDFRT Co. (Breadfruit Company), a clothing brand that is proudly inspired and designed in Micronesia. What started out as a passion project of Mr. Acer Apis, has now grown its presence throughout Micronesia, the Pacific, and even into Asia and the U.S. Mainland. This case demonstrates how passion, partying, an unexpected pregnancy, and perseverance created a brand that brings Micronesia together.

PLANTING THE SEED

In 2007, Acer Apis was in the seventh grade when he moved to Beijing from his home in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). His father had just been tapped to serve as the Ambassador of the FSM to China. Homesick and in a foreign country, Apis began to discover his passion for drawing.

As was customary for high school boys in Micronesia, he later applied for admission and was accepted into Xavier High School, in the island of Weno of Chuuk state in the Federated States of Micronesia. Xavier High School, a Jesuit school, was the premier institution in Micronesia which has graduated countless leaders throughout the Pacific.

It was while he was studying at Xavier High School that Apis honed his skills in art and learned graphic design, but not through the traditional classes being taught at school. In fact, at the time, Apis was the only student with a laptop, which was useless even at a leading institution such as Xavier. Xavier prided itself in building men of the highest character, and laptops were seen as a distraction. Apis would later meet another student with a laptop who had introduced him to Adobe Photoshop, and that was when Apis explored the endless possibilities of graphic design.

Apis later returned home to Pohnpei state where he graduated high school and began pursuing his dream

of starting a clothing company. Although Apis was able to launch his company, BRDFRT Co. initially did not succeed due to the high costs associated with producing Apis' designs locally within Pohnpei state.

TURNING POINT

In 2015, Apis met his wife, and they both decided to pursue their higher education, ultimately returning to Beijing, China, exerting its soft-power to win over the FSM's support in the ever-evolving geopolitical landscape, is home to a sizable population of students from the Federated States of Micronesia who are beneficiaries of scholarships and sponsorships from the People's Republic of China. While Apis attended the Beijing University of Technology, Apis and his wife welcomed their first child. The joy and responsibilities associated with parenting pushed Apis into action so that he could support his young family. Armed with his skills and passion in graphic design, as well as Apis' PlayStation 4, BRDFRT Co. got off the ground. Apis sold his gaming console and placed the first order of 50 shirts using the money from the sale.

Within the close-knit Micronesian student community at the Beijing University of Technology, word got around quickly about Apis' Micronesian-inspired apparel, and within a day, Apis sold his entire inventory.

Having successfully established a desired product within a niche market at the Beijing University of Technology, Apis used the proceeds he earned from the initial order and placed a second order - doubling the size of his initial order. Almost immediately, that too sold out. While Apis was grateful to have a successful reboot of his business, his main goal was to share these unique Micronesian-inspired designs back home. Leveraging his network in Pohnpei, Apis reached out to a close family friend who owned



BroFit

North Pacific Tribe

The BroFit Gang



Imelda Store. To this day, Imelda Store is a staple in the local community for the latest fashion trends and is known as its primary clothing retailer. At this point Apis had successfully proven the viability of his product, laying the groundwork for future expansion.

As Apis began sharing his designs with his new prospective client, he immediately received an order for more than four times what he had initially started out with. When the initial order destined for Pohnpei finally hit the shelves of Imelda Store, the inventory quickly sold out and from then, BRDFRT Co. immediately became a regular supplier.

Apis is now connecting his clothing brand to friends and family from the Micronesian diaspora in the United States Mainland and around the world, sharing his art while also allowing his fellow Micronesians to proudly display their roots and maintain a connection to their homeland. Thanks to the unique relationship between the United States and the Federated States of Micronesia through the Compact of Free Association (COFA), Apis' clothing line has allowed over 25,000 sons and daughters of Micronesia and over 95,000 COFA migrants in the United States to maintain their sense of identity, pride, and connection to their homeland.

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WATCHING THE ROOTS GROW

Today, BRDFRT Co.'s products are worn with pride throughout Micronesia. Apis attributes this success to his marketing approach, utilizing social media and his production company. In addition to founding

BRDFRT Co., Apis also manages North Pacific Tribe Media, a full-service photography and production company which produces contemporary media that is shared through various social media platforms. In the Federated States of Micronesia, locals utilize the Facebook platform as the primary means to communicate with one another, especially for its capability of connecting with family members who have left their homeland. North Pacific Tribe Media leverages the vast audience on the Facebook platform and produces content that showcases the beauty of Micronesia while also allowing the Micronesian diaspora abroad to reminisce and remain connected to their homeland. While one may watch North Pacific Tribe Media's videos to view the beautiful scenery on the Micronesian paradise, the content produced by North Pacific Tribe Media all depict the latest trends produced by BRDFRT Co. For Apis, this was a match made in heaven as the product produced by BRDFRT Co., depicting traditional Micronesian designs, complements the scenic shots produced by North Pacific Tribe Media. As another means of marketing his product, Apis regularly supports local fundraisers. From local schools to medical fundraisers, BRDFRT Co. is a much sought-after raffle prize at many local events.

CULTURE AND SENSE OF IDENTITY

When setting up his brand, Apis knew he wanted something unique to his homeland, while also encompassing the entire Pacific. When brainstorming his brand name, he came up with a few ideas. Initially, he thought about naming the company "coconut," but realized coconut was something that was also found in some Asian countries - such as Thailand. He then thought about naming the company "banana," but in the native Pohnpeian language, the term banana was also synonymous with an expletive. Apis settled with BRDFRT Co., as breadfruit is something that is consumed as a staple on dinner tables throughout the Pacific. While there are vast differences amongst Pacific cultures, such as those between the North

Pacific and South Pacific, breadfruit is something that remains a constant on dinner tables across the Blue Continent.

With a name settled, Apis continues to stay true to his vision of creating products depicting the true beauty of Micronesia. For Apis, this meant focusing on understanding Micronesian designs and patterns. He has spent countless hours studying the history and art of the region and is truly passionate about the work he has done. What once started out as an idea that struggled to launch off the ground is now making waves throughout the Pacific, and transcending oceans around the world. Apis attributes his success to the support he has from his family, and more importantly his community. Most significantly, Apis attributes his success to being able to pursue his passion while at the same time bringing people around the world to put Micronesia on their backs.

“Most significantly, Apis attributes his success to being able to pursue his passion while at the same time bringing people around the world to put Micronesia on their backs.”

A FIRMLY ROOTED BREADFRUIT TREE

What started out as a brand that sold primarily through word of mouth, and then on the shelves of a friend’s store, BRDFRT Co. has finally established a brick-and-mortar store in the heart of Kolonia, Pohnpei. Pohnpei, being the capital of the Federated States of Micronesia is the center for trade within the FSM. Located across the Kolonia-China Friendship Center, and adjacent to the Spanish Wall, BRDFRT Co. has cemented its presence in the heart of commerce for the FSM.

To learn more about BRDFRT Co., you can visit [brdfrtc](#) on Instagram or [BRDFRTco.](#) on Facebook.

This case study was written by Chirag M. Bhojwani, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.



BEYOND THE BARBELL

UNIFIED FIT'S HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FITNESS

Unified Fit may seem like just another gym on the island but their approach to fitness is anything but traditional. Believing there is no one way to define fitness, Unified Fit's philosophy aligns fitness goals with each member's individual lifestyle goals: whether it be to be stronger, leaner, or just be a better version of themselves. True to its name, their holistic approach highlights a unified focus on physical, mental, and emotional well-being - a unique offering called "service pathway" that truly sets them apart.

SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

As the sons of Carlos Barretto, a local filmmaker and owner of Shooting Star Productions, Caleb and Topher Barretto felt inclined to participate in the family business and preserve its legacy. However, the brothers led very active lifestyles, competing and representing Guam in various outdoor sports, and felt that the film industry was not the right fit for them. While both loved fitness, neither Caleb nor Topher expected to make a career out of it.

But Caleb knew he wanted to do more, make a difference, and play a part in shifting the community's attitudes and perceptions toward training and fitness. "If we can just shift one percent of the population, bring them to a gym like Unified Fit and focus on preventing and overcoming non-communicable diseases like Type 2 Diabetes, then that would make a big impact and help make a mark in society," Caleb stated. While opening a gym in Guam, where cultural and lifestyle preferences do not prioritize fitness seemed counterintuitive, the dream to make an impact in the community was stronger and both brothers decided to jump in, shoot their shot, and contribute to shifting the perspective towards adopting healthier lifestyles by launching Unified Fit.

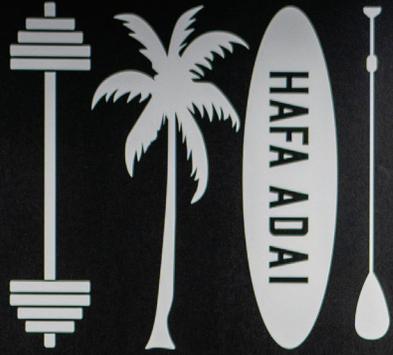
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"If we can just shift one percent of the population, bring them to a gym like Unified Fit and focus on preventing and overcoming non-communicable diseases like Type 2 Diabetes, then that would make a big impact and help make a mark in society." - Caleb Barretto

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THE UNIFIED APPROACH TO FITNESS

Unified Fit officially opened their doors in May 2014, at the height of the CrossFit boom in Guam. CrossFit gyms suddenly blanketed the island, saturating the market for high-intensity training and workouts. Many CrossFit gyms operated without an official brick-and-mortar location and were not strictly regulated due to the lack of industry standards. Quantity over quality became the priority, which ultimately contributed to the decline of CrossFit's popularity within the community. While most gyms catered to the same market and exercise needs, Unified Fit took a more personal and holistic approach to fitness and wellness - focusing not just on physical health but also recognizing how physical health impacts their clients' emotional and mental well-being. "We have client avatars that we use to segment the market to combat the stigma of what a CrossFitter looks like," shares Caleb. CrossFit is a form of high-intensity interval training designed to focus on strength building and conditioning. Although it involves functional movements usually performed in daily life, the intensity of the workout has intimidated many. Caleb clarifies that the members who compete on behalf of Unified Fit during CrossFit season represent just



UNIFIED



two percent of their total clientele. These members undergo rigorous training to qualify for the competition, a training regimen that is not recommended or the best fit for a regular CrossFitter. A majority of their members are prediabetic, are diabetic and currently enrolled in dialysis treatments, or have achy joints that they are working to manage. True to their mission, Unified Fit offers a unified approach to fitness and has designed classes that cater to different needs and adjust depending on the varying capabilities of their target segment. "I want to help our clients put more credits in their emotional bank account," Caleb explains, "so we always ask, 'What do you do? What's your ideal lifestyle? What are your goals?'"

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This initial, in-depth one-on-one assessment is unique to Unified Fit, an offering they call "Our Service Pathway." The Service Pathway highlights their fitness philosophy and sets the tone for their two main fitness programs - the BUILD program and the BURN program. "The pinnacle of our philosophy focuses on improving our clients' quality of life, so depending on their assessment, a recommended regimen combining BUILD and BURN components is designed to help them achieve their fitness and life goals," Caleb shared. BUILD creates structural integrity and focuses on weightlifting and resistance

training while BURN helps with conditioning and developing higher tolerance to life's stressors and daily fatigue. "We're not just a CrossFit gym, we offer more than just CrossFit training. The sense of belonging, community, and acceptance our members experience at our gym is a crucial differentiator for Unified Fit," Caleb added.

LIFTING UP GUAM

On top of Unified Fit's mission to promote wellness and fitness while also launching the Unified Anywhere initiative during the pandemic, the brothers are involved in various community events that aim to uplift Guam and its communities. Every year for Thanksgiving, they host the Burn the Bird event that features a free 5K and community workout program to help get people into a healthy mindset for the holidays. They also support Toys for Tots through free community workouts where participants are encouraged to bring a toy donation in lieu of the gym workout fee. Outside of Unified Fit, Caleb and Topher created the General Fitness Competition that features the Functional Fitness League and DRY-TRI events. Created to capitalize on athletes' training efforts for the annual CrossFit Open, the Functional Fitness League is a first-of-its-kind competition that features a series of events that provide an opportunity for CrossFit athletes on Guam to showcase their abilities and foster camaraderie between the different CrossFit gyms on island. DRY-TRI, born out of the need for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, is essentially a triathlon done on land which retains the run portion and substitutes the swim portion for a rowing machine and similarly the road bike portion for a stationary bike. These changes attracted participants beyond the CrossFit world including the endurance-fitness community as well as other residents, who have active lifestyles for leisure, rather than just professional athletes. Through these events, the General Fitness Competition was able to raise enough money to help fund the renovation of the Tamuning Community Center. "I grew up playing

basketball and dodgeball leagues there so to see it in ruins motivated me to give back to the community, help provide a venue for kids to participate in sports and perpetuate the benefits of adopting an active lifestyle,” Caleb concluded.

THE WEIGHT OF COMPETITION

As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted business operations all over the world, the fitness industry was one of the many businesses that were hit the hardest. Driven to outlast the pandemic, Caleb knew it was time to think beyond profitability and invest in sustainability. Because of low barriers to entry within the CrossFit industry, many CrossFit gyms were able to obtain licenses to operate with minimal industry regulation and certification requirements. Unfortunately, this lack of clear franchise guidelines and government regulations also shaped negative customer experiences that impacted the perception of CrossFit industry as a whole within the community.

To address this, Caleb became more involved in rebranding Unified Fit into a fitness center, focusing on their clients’ overall well-being versus being just another CrossFit gym. Supported by a loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration, Caleb began the rebranding process with full support from his brother Topher, who has since decided to pursue other opportunities and transferred full ownership to him. First came the name change, from Unified Guam to Unified Fit, then an overhaul of the website, logo, and equipment which cemented this transition. Leveraging their competitive location right behind the International Trade Center building in Tamuning, Guam, a local historic landmark akin to the World Trade Center, Unified Fit’s marketing strategy also shifted their focus towards young professionals and business groups in the area, appealing to their need for convenience, flexibility, and accessibility for their workouts. United Fit utilizes a differentiation strategy, pricing higher than their competition, but can do so by employing certified professionals, providing

access to the latest equipment, and deploying a personalized training methodology that cannot be matched by other gyms in Guam. At Unified Fit, you can come in for the experience and trust you will leave with results.

THE FUTURE OF FITNESS

Despite industry drawbacks and the challenges of rebranding, Unified Fit powers through with a vision that within the next five years, they aim to be the go-to place for safe and sustainable exercise. “As much as how people identify stretching with yoga, I want Unified Fit to be identified with performance and wellness,” Caleb explained. There is no one way to define fitness. For some, it is about building endurance and stamina while for most, it is about improving not just physical, but emotional and mental health as well. This holistic approach to fitness is what sets Unified Fit apart from its competitors. The belief that fitness should be used to elevate and fuel life experiences remains at the core of their mission - to help you achieve your goals, however big or small they may be.

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This case study was written by Jimi G. Taitano, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.



ATOS
BRAZILIAN
JIU-JITSU
GUAM

PASSION INSPIRES PURPOSE

THE EMERGENCE OF ATOS JIU-JITSU GUAM

The art of Jiu-Jitsu is nothing new to the Guam sports scene. Gyms and academies have come and gone over the years, but the one constant that remains is the level of passion. One of Guam's very own generational athletes, Professor Michael Carbullido, has taken his immense passion for Jiu-Jitsu to pursue a lifelong dream to both excel in his craft and find a way to give back to a community that has given him so much through ATOS Guam. Through careful planning, his new direction and purpose led to the expansion of the world-renowned ATOS Jiu-Jitsu Academy from San Diego, California straight into the heart of Tumon Bay, Guam. The key component to his and ATOS Jiu-Jitsu Guam's success in less than two years has been the unquestionably high caliber of quality and championship experience that sets ATOS apart from the rest of the pack. Professor Carbullido also has a passion for teaching that enlightens the room; his wealth of knowledge is incomparable, and the environment is that of family and togetherness. The ATOS business culture built around these pillars creates a solid foundation that is worth fighting for.

STRONG TIES BACK HOME

Driven by his passion for Jiu-Jitsu and his deep love for his family, Professor Carbullido had high aspirations from a young age. "I've always been a dreamer and a believer," Carbullido says. He fell in love with Jiu-Jitsu and dreamt of competing on the international stage. Unfortunately, the limited number of competitions in Guam left him with only a few options, and he knew he would have to leave home to pursue his dreams. Despite being far from home, he remained focused on his family, particularly his mom and his sister. "I always wanted to do something in my life that would take care of them." In 2009, his journey began bringing him to the world-re-

nowned ATOS Jiu-Jitsu Academy headquarters in San Diego, California, where he trained under the guidance of head Professor, founder, and International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation (IBJJF) World Champion, Andre Galvao.

A LEGEND IN THE MAKING

Leaving Guam turned out to be the springboard to his success and one that many athletes could only hope for. For 10 years, he trained with the best athletes in the sport, under the expert guidance of Professor Galvao, a highly accomplished jiu-jitsu competitor and coach - a perfect recipe for achieving greatness. This led to a remarkable career filled with achievements in the world of Jiu-Jitsu, including winning first place as a blue belt at the 2011 IBJJF Pan AM Jiu-Jitsu championships. He also won first place at the US American Nationals in both weight and absolute categories as a brown belt from 2013 to 2014. He won the 2015 ALL-Japan Jiu-Jitsu championships. He also placed on the podium in high-ranked competitions such as the World Jiu-Jitsu Championships in Abu Dhabi, in 2014.

For many, this would already be considered an epic list of accomplishments, but the blessings were only starting to pile on. Whilst residing in San Diego, he came across his delightful spouse Kristy and became the proud parent of a little champion, their son Zomu. Through dedication and an unparalleled work ethic, in 2017 Professor Carbullido inevitably obtained his black belt while training in San Diego and his passion and love for the sport carried over into the next chapter of greatness - coaching and inspiring others.

LEADING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHAMPIONS

Professor Carbullido not only excelled as a Jiu-Jitsu competitor, but he found the same level of success in coaching kids for the last decade. His list of coaching accomplishments is just as impressive as his accomplishments on the mat. Whilst coaching out of ATOS headquarters in San Diego, Professor Carbullido's students have excelled at the highest levels of competition from 2013 to 2018 winning first place overall at the Pan Kids Jiu-Jitsu Championships. At the IBJJF Kids International Jiu-Jitsu Championships, his students won first place overall from 2014 to 2017. Additionally, during the IBJJF American National Kids Jiu-Jitsu Championships, his team won top three finishes from 2013 to 2016. His goal is to replicate his coaching success in Guam, and he has made a promising start in the first two years of ATOS being open.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic put an abrupt hold on everything, and the world seemed to slow down for Professor Carbullido. "I also wasn't really doing Jiu-Jitsu at the time ... we were thinking a lot about our family back home in Guam. We thought about our son Zomu's future, how we wanted to raise him in Guam and give him everything we had growing up surrounded by family," Carbullido says. It wasn't until 2020 when Professor Carbullido shared his vision of opening an ATOS academy in Guam with Professor Galvao and with his blessings, they decided to pack up and move home.

THE CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges for many service-based businesses such as ATOS. Although they were starting their first business in Guam, they were well-prepared with the existing strategies that have made ATOS a world-renowned academy and a successful business model. Professor Carbullido praises Professor Galvao and his wife Angelica for being one of the best entrepreneurs

in the sport of Jiu-Jitsu. Simple advice shared by Professor Galvao and Angelica - "Do not reinvent the wheel, stick to what works, only adjust to the culture." Specifically for Guam, ATOS Guam has catered to the market by providing training opportunities for those whose work by offering additional night classes, effective social media and branding strategies, and supplementing with ATOS branded merchandise. Springboarding off of his success, Professor Carbullido was also able to launch his brand in CARBS Jiu-Jitsu, which is sold at the gym and online.

BLACK BELT STANDARDS

As part of their membership benefits, ATOS academies around the world provide their members with the advantage of receiving training from first-rate instructors. Regardless of the age group or class size, students are led by current top-ranked professionals or world champions. The same can be said for Guam. Professor Carbullido leads the academy backed by an extensive network of professional Jiu-Jitsu instructors under the ATOS umbrella. There is no other academy in Guam that possesses this type of network and capacity to depend. ATOS world-wide and at ATOS Jiu-Jitsu Guam can say they have champions training future champions.

The fundamental secret recipe, however, involves a fusion of Professor Carbullido and Kristy's innate talent to establish a familial atmosphere. Once you spend some time with them, you comprehend that their modest and warm-hearted nature is the reason behind creating a safe environment for adults and children. This ethos is evident in their highly successful youth classes which range from 3-5-year-old class, a 6-8-year-old class, and an 8-13 year old class. Additionally, what started as a sport for one individual has grown into a family affair, where one membership has quickly compounded into four paying members from the same household per month.

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“The fundamental secret recipe, however, involves a fusion of Professor Carbullido and Kristy’s innate talent to establish a familial atmosphere.”
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GREATNESS INSPIRING GREATNESS

Today, ATOS Jiu-Jitsu is more than just a place to learn martial arts. It is a place where people come together to support one another, to push each other to be the best versions of themselves - a place to encourage growth both on and off the mat. What started as a dream to provide for his family and to give back to his island has grown into a vibrant community that supports and uplifts one another day in and day out. To Professor Carbullido, the academy’s competitive advantage is from maintaining focus on yourself and not on others. He states that “instead of trying to find advantages over our competitors . . . I want to find ways to make our Jiu-Jitsu academy, our members, be the best versions of themselves. Professor Carbullido is ultimately striving towards raising the level of Jiu-Jitsu on Guam, both competitively and professionally.

Since its inception, ATOS has humbly dominated in almost every team category and division in each competition they have entered. The most recent example is the 2023 Mariana’s Pro Japan tournament in which the team took 3rd place overall in team rankings. The triumph of ATOS can be essentially attributed to the substantial brand recognition which is evident in the notable surge in student enrollment. Aside from all the success, however, Professor Carbullido and Kristy value and believe in the importance of each relationship with their customers above all.

FUTURE STATE

ATOS Guam could be considered disruptors in the business sense. They have created specific programs dedicated to youth when other gyms previously did not. The academy has also benefited from our island’s sports tourism programs under Guam Visitors Bureau, the islands destination management organization. ATOS has also benefited from visitors rolling onto their mats while passing through Guam. Again, ATOS is a world-renowned, highly reputable name in the Jiu-Jitsu community. Ultimately, Professor Carbullido and Kristy just want people to see their academy as a positive place to be able to learn and express themselves with friends and family, through the sport of Jiu-Jitsu. A unique offering in a sport that is used for combat and competition.

“We have scratched the surface in many, many ways. Not only in business. I believe that our team, my team, can get to the highest level of the sport because I’ve been a part of it. I’ve seen it. I’ve been in it, and I’ve produced ‘it’ (by coaching) in others. And so, I know I can do it. We’re a tough culture!”

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This case study was written by Justin M. B. Andre, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.

IT
WAS
ALL A
DREAM

Stax



STAX

THE PERFECT COMBO OF CHARACTER, CREATIVITY, AND COMMUNITY

In 2017, STAX, a locally owned company founded by Jose De Asis, brought something new to Guam's culinary scene: sliders. Since its establishment, STAX has come a long way from its humble beginnings as a pop-up stand to having a full brick-and-mortar restaurant and office. STAX offers smaller sliders to allow customers room to order more. Along with their main dish, they offer perfectly paired craft sauces and custom condiments that complement the sliders, giving customers variety and a unique dining experience. The company continues to be a leader in the local food industry that has become a hit among locals and tourists alike. With its commitment to quality, STAX has quickly become a beloved staple in the Guam food scene.

IT WAS ALL JUST A DREAM

STAX is a testament to what happens when passion and creativity are taken outside the box. Jose De Asis has perfectly married his love for food and branding, transforming his business' potential beyond just another food place. As evidenced by STAX's success in Guam's food market, De Asis and his team are reinventing Guam's food industry through creative branding and finding value in community over competition.

Having worked in retail, De Asis was inspired by the companies he worked for and admired the journey these entrepreneurs took to get to where they are. He was amazed by the artistic freedom that was showcased throughout their products. He dreamed of what it would be like to have his own company one day, which to this day, is still a part of the company's history. Through trendy neon lighting, the song lyrics of the late Notorious B.I.G., "It was all a dream," is physically cemented on one of the store's walls. When he shifted his career to banking, De Asis spent some

time getting to know other entrepreneurs, which fed into his growing appetite for branding and owning a business. His clients gave him an insight into the business world and piqued his curiosity to work on some of his ideas. His customer-focused approach to talking to his clients and his penchant for branding helped him identify a gap in the fast-food market that he later filled with the creation of STAX.

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"Jose De Asis has perfectly married his love for food and branding, transforming his business' potential beyond just another food place."

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BEYOND THE BURGERS

The fast-food industry in Guam is dominated by large companies known nationwide with burgers as the main course. Popular fast-food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Jack in the Box, and Jollibee are found around some of the island's prime locations. According to De Asis, if you want to stand out, you have to do something unexpected, so he intentionally chose to start with a smaller yet tastier slider than a burger.

To differentiate STAX in an oversaturated market, De Asis focused on creating a brand that goes beyond the food, inspiring customer loyalty and recognition. He saw STAX as an independent brand with much potential for product and service expansion rather than just a fast-food joint. By presenting his meals and combos in unique ways that captured both local and tourists' attention, he channeled his creativity into the aesthetics of the restaurant, creating a distinct



identity for the business. According to De Asis, STAX is not limited to the idea of sliders and fries alone but also provides subtle hints of retail and discovery. For example, customers who enter their restaurant may find a few on-trend units of merchandise on display, catch a sense of other local businesses through their collaborative take on spicy condiments, or enjoy a new favorite brand of drink on their menu. The very atmosphere of their establishment gives off a welcoming feeling by the crew members, freely encouraging their customers to mix and match orders to their liking. With this approach, buying sliders when entering STAX becomes a more memorable experience.

It is all about creating a story to remember. The concept of STAX is peppered in its branding and marketing efforts. De Asis wanted to create an experience through their intentional and well-thought-out packaging, craft sauces, combinations, staff, and overall atmosphere of his business and brand. These were captured and brought even more to life during their block party grand opening on February 16, 2019, to Hagatña, Guam. The event featured STAX and other up-and-coming, small business owners collaborating and setting up shop. This concept of community and collaboration highlighted the essence of STAX, its product, its story, and beyond.

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“It is all about creating a story to remember. The concept of STAX is peppered in its branding and marketing efforts.”

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GETTING THROUGH

As part of the food industry in Guam, STAX is not immune to challenges and has had its fair share of struggles. As a first-time business owner, De

Asis gracefully navigated inflation, cost of goods, and supply chain issues with his team. They took a proactive approach to problem-solving and had always learned from their past experiences. Valuing community over competition has also benefited STAX during times of need. De Asis and his team were able to lean on other food industry partners to provide support when needed. The values that STAX stands for are shared and felt through his support towards other small businesses as well. There are enough slices of the pie to go around, and STAX embodies this throughout its entire operations paired with its marketing efforts that always recognize other business partners.

BUILDING BETTER INGREDIENTS

Growth is on the horizon for STAX, but it starts with the basic ingredients. For STAX, De Asis shifted his investments inwards and focused on building a team that helped the business stay ahead of the curve.

With a large team to manage, De Asis stressed the importance of a reliable crew. As he puts it, the biggest threat to his company is not outside competition, but are instead, not having a reliable team to make things happen. He has a great sense of gratitude towards his team because he recognizes that the most significant drivers for the company's growth will depend on them the most. De Asis is constantly looking for ways to build and retain the quality of his team, ensuring they are heard, seen, recognized, and taken care of. These are the ingredients for a healthy and happy business.

External growth will come naturally. De Asis and his team will continue their focus on internal growth in tandem with perfecting their products and services.

“De Asis is constantly looking for ways to build and retain the quality of his team, ensuring they are heard, seen, recognized, and taken care of. These are the ingredients for a healthy and happy business.”

KEEP THE FRYER BURNING

STAX is an innovative and community-driven business that has taken a more creative approach in the food industry. De Asis and his team have detached themselves from being perceived as just another fast-food joint. Their success can be attributed to their focus on building brand character, customer loyalty and recognition, creative approach in marketing, and choosing community over competition. De Asis continues to be dedicated to creating a memorable experience through STAX by sharing their passion for food and branding. The recognition they value as a business is not just through the number of transactions or orders they have but for the effort they put into every aspect of their business. As STAX continues to grow, De Asis remains committed to building and retaining a reliable team and perfecting their products and services for more ventures, but never losing sight that this was once only just a dream.

This case study was written by Maiko Nakamura, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.



SAKURA NOODLE HOUSE

REBELLION, DETERMINATION, AND AN EVER-EVOLVING LEGACY

In the 1970s, the country of Japan experienced an economic boom, which meant its citizens had more financial means to travel. Guam directly benefited from this, becoming a highly frequented travel destination for Japanese visitors. This case study follows the evolution of one of the island's oldest Japanese restaurants in Guam, the Sakura Noodle House, which got its start catering to Japanese tourists looking for a taste of home.

BREAKING TRADITION

For the Miwa family, making noodles was not just a useful skill to have in the kitchen. It was a skill that their lives depended on. Saburo Miwa's father owned a noodle-making factory in Japan. Saburo and his siblings were all taught the craft of making noodles under the guidance of their father. Having grown up around the business and being equipped with noodle-making skills, Saburo was poised to take over the factory. However, he did not want to carry on the family business. Saburo had dreams to do something bigger and better for himself. Determined to forge his path, Saburo left the country in 1967 to build a new life for his family on the island of Guam.

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"For the Miwa family, making noodles was not just a useful skill to have in the kitchen. It was a skill that their lives depended on."

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RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

While Saburo was able to break away from the family's business in Japan, he found himself working in a similar environment in Guam – Okonomiyaki

House, a restaurant that served Japanese cuisine. After working for over five years, he was presented with the opportunity of a lifetime. The restaurant was not doing as well as the owner desired, and he was ready to throw in the towel and move home to Japan. Saburo's dreams were finally coming to fruition. This was the reason he had left his home all those years ago to start his own business.

On March 12, 1973, Sakura Noodle House opened its doors to the people of Guam, serving authentic Japanese cuisine with high-quality fresh ingredients. Saburo could not have planned a more opportune time to enter Guam's food service industry. The island experienced an influx of Japanese visitors in the 1970s – a direct result of combined efforts of the local government and the business community to establish and promote a tourism industry for Guam during the previous decade.

Not long before the restaurant was established, Duty-Free Shoppers (DFS), a global duty-free retail store opened its first downtown location in the central village of Tamuning, Guam. This shop was a hotspot for visitors and was located right next to Sakura Noodle House. The restaurant was in a "must-stop" location within tour bus routes for customers of DFS. Tourists and bus drivers alike visited the restaurant while waiting for other tour participants to finish their shopping at the duty-free shop.

AN UPHILL CLIMB

Sakura Noodle House boasted a menu consisting of authentic Japanese food made with fresh ingredients. However, this was not enough to draw in the number of customers they desired. Saburo realized that at the time of creating his restaurant, the market was simply not ready for a purely Japanese menu. He then

revamped the menu to include a mix of Japanese and local cuisines. Giving the local customers a taste of familiar foods alongside the Japanese food helped to get patrons in the door. The salad dressing has consistently received rave reviews over the years.

In 1975, the restaurant was able to expand its offerings yet again. Saburo saw the opportunity to sell his noodles outside of the restaurant. Sakura Noodle House began producing noodles and selling them to other businesses. These fresh noodles are still seen today in local supermarkets, grocery stores, and other restaurants.

Capitalizing on the momentum the business had gained, Saburo decided to open up a second location in the island’s capital city of Hagatna, Guam. The second branch was formed in one of the island’s leading shopping centers, the Julale Center, which was an area that had plenty of foot traffic and hungry customers. Though this location was popular, its success was short-lived, as a severe gas leak in the building led to an explosion forcing Saburo to close the doors on this chapter of the Sakura Noodle House.

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“Saburo saw the opportunity to sell his noodles outside of the restaurant. Sakura Noodle House began producing noodles and selling them to other businesses.”

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FROM UNITY COMES STRENGTH

On December 8, 2002, Guam was hit by Super Typhoon Pongsona which is notable for being one of the worst typhoons to ever hit the island. Pongsona caused strong winds and heavy rain that destroyed buildings and caused the island to be without electricity for weeks. Seeing the devastation on the island,

Saburo and his family wanted to help in whatever way they could. Sakura Noodle House became a place of relief for members of the community. The Miwa family worked tirelessly in the restaurant to provide for anyone who needed a warm meal. From that day on, Sakura Noodle House became more than just a noodle house. It became a symbol of resilience and hope for the people of Guam.

Sakura Noodle House continues to give back to the community even to this day. The restaurant contributes meals to Kamalen Karidat, a non-profit organization that provides hot meals to those in need. Sakura Noodle House also donates noodles to veterans and veteran organizations.

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“Sakura Noodle House became a place of relief for members of the community. The Miwa family worked tirelessly in the restaurant to provide for anyone who needed a warm meal.”

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BUILDING A NEW LEGACY

Being a family business, Saburo had intended to eventually pass the torch to his son Ryu. However, Ryu refused to take over the family business and moved to the mainland to pursue other opportunities—ironically putting Saburo in the same shoes his father was in many, many years ago. Saburo continued to run the business on his own but struggled to stay in business during the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Saburo knew it was time to retire. He gave his son an ultimatum – take over the family business or Sakura Noodle House would be closing its doors. Ryu had two weeks to decide. Ryu had grown up watching his father in the kitchen, and he had learned everything

he knew about cooking and running a business from his observing and working with his father. Thus, Ryu made the decision to become the new president of Sakura Noodle House in 2020.

“He gave his son an ultimatum – take over the family business or Sakura Noodle House would be closing its doors. Ryu had two weeks to decide.”

Sakura Noodle House recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Ryu is determined to maintain the success of the family’s business. He has modernized the menu – keeping old items for nostalgia but adding new items and flavors to keep customers on their toes. Ryu has also included new menu items such as chicken skin, curry, and other local favorites. He has plans to expand their services by catering to schools, non-profit organizations, and other institutions within the community.

Sakura Noodle House has come a long way since 1973. The success of the establishment is a testament to Saburo and Ryu’s drive, perseverance, and willingness to adapt and overcome. With over 50 years of experience in serving traditional Japanese cuisine, the restaurant remains an establishment that carries the legacy of both old and new traditions. Ryu continues to operate the restaurant with the same passion and dedication that his father had and hopes to continue to do so for many more years to come.

This case study was written by Michelle A. Puno, a member of the University of Guam Professional Master of Business Administration program, Cohort XVIII.



REST

mosa's
Joint
GUAM, USA

GUAM GOLD
GUAM BREWERY

Toro
WATER
STRAW
PEACH
COCAINE

MOSA'S JOINT

WHERE EMPLOYEES ARE THE SECRET INGREDIENT

Food trucks are the latest craze amongst Guam's diners. Their growing popularity has led to new food truck establishments popping up weekly to meet public demand. This case study follows the journey of one of Guam's pioneer food trucks which has successfully grown into the brick-and-mortar establishment known today as Mosa's Joint. Entrepreneurs Monique Genereux Amani and Sara Pleadwell Doctor have been serving fusion cuisine at their establishment for over a decade, achieving the longevity many restaurateurs strive for.

HUMBLE HOTBOX

For Sara and Monique, food has always been a part of their lives. Fueled by a desire to be their own bosses and years of experience in the restaurant industry, these best friends took a leap of faith and opened Mosa's (a combination of the first two letters of each of their first names) Hotbox, one of Guam's first food trucks in June 2011. Between busy work and school schedules, putting time into the Hotbox was a real labor of love.

As one of three food truck competitors, Mosa's made a name for itself with just two items on the menu – tacos and gyros. As their popularity grew, the restaurant was invited to Guam's Burger Festival which led to the addition of their award-winning bleu cheese-burger and lamb burger to the menu.

Even as the Hotbox thrived, the hustle did not end. Sara and Monique continued to work hard and save their profits. In 2013, they reached a milestone, investing in their first brick-and-mortar location. It was a 1,200-foot space located in the central village of Tamuning, Guam with nine tables and six seats at the bar. Mosa's quickly outgrew this place.

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"Even as the Hotbox thrived, the hustle did not end. Sara and Monique continued to work hard and save their profits. In 2013, they reached a milestone, investing in their first brick-and-mortar location."
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Within two years, Sara and Monique were once again in search of a new home. After seeing numerous spaces that were not the right fit, they were drawn to a space in the capital city of Hagatña. This central village was the focus of the Hagatña Restoration and Redevelopment Plan – a plan adopted by the local government in 2005 to revitalize the capital city through capital improvements and economic development – making it the perfect location for a bustling restaurant. Nestled in the heart of the village, what was once an office space was ready to be transformed into the new Mosa's Joint. The journey was not an easy one. Having spent all their money to secure the space, there was little left to spend on the renovation. Once again, owners Sara and Monique found themselves with the daunting task of starting from scratch – this time in a location nearly three times the size of their previous space. The duo knew their only options were either to sink or swim. With unwavering determination and relentless commitment to the grind, they succeeded. Mosa's grew to be the vibrant establishment that it is today – a place where customers can find great food, a welcoming atmosphere, and live music every night.

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“With unwavering determination and relentless commitment to the grind, they succeeded. Mosa’s grew to be the vibrant establishment that it is today – a place where customers can find great food, a welcoming atmosphere, and live music every night.”
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THE SECRET INGREDIENT

Most patrons can attest to Mosa’s consistent quality of food and warm hospitality, but according to Monique, the secret ingredient to their success is the care and respect they have for their employees. At Mosa’s, employees are treated like family. From years of experience working under poor management, Sara and Monique knew exactly what they did not want to be to their employees. Understanding how much management style impacts employee performance, morale and motivation led the owners to cultivate an environment of trust and support within the workplace.

If a mistake is made on shift, employees are honest and willing to take ownership of their mistakes. They are not afraid to take the issue up to management in order to come up with a resolution together. At their establishment, customers are welcomed like family unless they disrespect the staff. Once they cross that line, they are shown the door. “My employees are way more important than having somebody miserable in my restaurant,” explains Monique.

While turnover is inevitable in this industry, it was especially prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many food service workers opted to forego employment to participate in the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program – aid provided by the federal government to people who had lost their jobs

during the pandemic. However, Sara and Monique are proud to say that they maintained most of their employees during the COVID-19 crisis. The two attribute this loyalty to their management style. Sara and Monique looked out for their employees in this difficult time. They not only utilized the Paycheck Protection Program funds – pandemic relief funds intended to help employers keep their staff employed – but also took a pay cut to ensure that they could keep all their employees. Mosa’s employees are provided a competitive benefits package including insurance and 401(k) plans. For most restaurant businesses in Guam, employees are not able to avail of these types of benefits.

ALL GROWN UP

A few employees have been with Mosa’s since the beginning of the Hotbox days, a couple of them starting when they were just sixteen years old. Employers Sara and Monique are proud to see how these individuals have grown through the years. They started as young boys and have grown into respectable men, and some are even fathers. While the duo is grateful for their loyalty, they continuously encourage them to pursue their dreams. “We always stress that to everyone. This is mine and Sara’s dream. It doesn’t have to be your dream,” Monique tells her staff.

Blake Bristol was one of those employees turning his dream into a reality. He started with the company at nineteen years old and worked his way up to become Mosa’s first general manager. He has since gone on to start his own venture, making mentors Sara and Monique proud.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Mosa’s success could not be possible without the support of the community over the past 12 years. “The more money we make, the more we invest it back into our employees and back into the community,” says Monique. The establishment is always looking for ways to give back to the community. They have

donated to foster care efforts on the island as this cause has needed increasingly more assistance in recent years. Sara and Monique are also very active supporters in the sports community. Coming from athletic backgrounds, the two are very passionate about ensuring support is available for both youth and adults in sports. The establishment sponsors a wide variety of sports from spearfishing to jiu-jitsu to soccer.

The pair is also adamant about buying as much locally as possible. The restaurant menu features local catch and produce. Unlike many other food establishments, Mosa's makes a concerted effort to incorporate sustainable practices into their daily operations. The restaurant keeps food waste minimal and consistently separates its recyclables.

TAKING A STEP BACK

With 12 years under their belt, owners Sara and Monique are happy right where they are. As they enter new seasons in their individual lives, the two have no plans to further expand the restaurant. While dreams exist of one day owning a garden to be able to harvest local produce for the restaurant, this is an idea for another day in the distant future. For now, Sara and Monique are content with nurturing the family that they have brought together so they can continue to deliver great food and service to the island.

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