

Fish and chips with a side of gratitude

Immanuel An didn't know what to think the first time he tried fish and chips.

The South Korean-born An was studying for his MBA in London, England, when he, his wife Jessica, and their two young children had their first taste of the British staple.

"To be honest with you, the first time, I didn't know what to think. It's different," An said.

Today, more than 20 years after his introduction to English-style fish and chips, An has more definite ideas about the popular take-away meal.

Fish and chips has become a way of life for him and Jessica as the founders of Union Jack Fish and Chips, a local chain with six locations and 35 employees throughout Niagara and into Burlington.

Serving battered fish filets and fries is also the new Canadians' way of building community and saying thanks to their adopted homeland.

"(Canada) gave our country freedom (during the Korean War)," An said. "We're so proud of our Canadian citizenship. Because of your blood, your sacrifice, we have our freedom. We want to say thank you to our customers."

Still, it was the couple's own sacrifice — and tenacity — that got them where they are today, with a growing restaurant chain and global aspirations.

When the Ans came to Canada in 2006, landing in Port Colborne, they struggled to find work despite their education. English was a challenge and money wasn't plentiful.

An prayed for a break. He got it one day when a member of his church suggested opening a fish and chips shop in town.

An ran with the idea and opened his first restaurant in 2008.

Every day was a new challenge, from deep fryers breaking to a trial-by-fire introduction to fish Fridays and learning which filet was which.

Still, they persevered. An became skilled at making the dishes on his menu, which he continuously refines to meet customers' needs, including with gluten-free offerings made from scratch every day and cooked in a separate fryer.

And together, he and Jessica, a talented pianist, who's performed for customers at the restaurant and elsewhere in the community as a token of thanks, built a loyal following.

A year after opening Union Jack in Port Colborne, they launched a second location in St. Catharines, and started racking up multiple "best" awards with the help of their dedicated, hard-working staff.

An hopes their story will inspire other new Canadians that anything is possible.



The secret to their success extends beyond their gratitude for the growth of Union Jack, however. It also includes their dedication to serving high quality food they're proud to serve.

Fries are cut fresh every day at all Union Jack locations. Batter is mixed daily. Coleslaw is added to every order. And so is love.

If An ever loses sight of that — and his goal to make Union Jack

a global brand with stores throughout the world — he turns to the sign above the door to the kitchen in every Union Jack outlet reminding him why he's there.

"I'm a business man. Business men make money but my philosophy with Union Jack is to make friends and family," An said. "Thanks to God, who provides everything we need. **He's our living hope.**"

