

Hana Yori: Food and fun

■ Show part of the attraction as meal is prepared at your table.

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MISHAWAKA

The chef flipped the shrimp tail from the steaming flat surface into the air, pulled out his shirt pocket a tad, and caught it. Soon another was soaring ... this time into his white chef's hat atop his head.

"Just like home cooking," John Nguyen remarked to the three women seated at the teppanyaki table, or grill, as he made a flaming volcano out of onions.

It's all part of the show at Hana Yori of Japan, the restaurant that has occupied a spot on Grape Road, just south of Edison, since 1987.

A juggling egg cracked perfectly on his spatula was equaled only by the joke Nguyen cracked right after it.

No doubt about it, the theme at Chung Park's Hana Yori is good times and good food.

"I promise myself, the only important thing is two things," Park said. "Customer happy. How? Let them have a good time with a good food."

He was born in Japan and spent the first five years of his life there, before moving to Korea, where he was raised. But it was not until decades later when the 28-year-old Seoul University graduate moved to the United States and began working at Ron of Japan steakhouse on East Ontario in Chicago that he entered the restaurant business.

And he has not left it, opening Japanese steakhouses and later selling them in both Indianapolis and Lafayette.

But it was while working in



Chef David Smith heats up the teppanyaki table, or grill, making a volcano out of onions and an alcohol solution. It's one of several ways the chefs entertain visitors to Hana Yori of Japan in Mishawaka.



Hana Yori of Japan owner Chung Park is in his 20th year of business and staffs six experienced teppan chefs and two sushi chefs.



Ongoing series highlights locally owned eateries.

Home-grown Restaurants

If you go

Hana Yori of Japan, 3601 Grape Road, Mishawaka:

■ Price range: from \$13.95 for teppan chicken to double portion of teppan steak for \$22 to seafood combo (shrimp, scallops and lobster boat for \$28.50). All meals include shrimp appetizer, salad, soup, fried rice and teppan vegetables.

■ Smoking allowed in lounge. Rest of restaurant is smoke free.

■ Alcohol, including Sapporo, is sold.

■ Sushi bar open evenings.

■ Kids' meals featuring chicken, sukiyaki or shrimp are \$9.50.

■ Lunches mostly in the \$7 to \$10 range. Lunch includes teppan vegetables and rice.

■ Hours: Open Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for lunch. For dinner, open 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday.

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Chicago, Indianapolis and Lafayette that Chung, now 64, kept passing by South Bend and wondering just how a restaurant would go there.

"I been checking this place a long time," Chung said.

He stopped by and liked the area and its size.

"This is a place I am going to settle down," he said. "I check with real estate people and I find out this is nicer than Lafayette, more people.

"It's a good community. South Bend and Mishawaka have gotten closer since I opened up and the living cost still very good."

Now in its 20th year, Hana Yori is a Michiana tradition of sorts, still holding up to the growing competition of Grape Road and Main Street.

"I have been here four times and I always enjoy it," said Sandra Arnold of Elkhart. "It's always fresh."

But she likes what she calls the "excitement" of the place, "the comedy that goes with it, the skills," she said.

And the food.

Shrimp, steak, lobster, chicken



Tribune photo/SU ANDERSON

Restaurant patrons Lindsay Geiger and Luke Foli, both of South Bend, eat their lunch of chicken and shrimp and a filet prepared by chef Tim Kim at Hana Yori of Japan.

and scallops are almost a sidebar as visitors are captivated by the show going on at the iron table, as Chung calls it sometimes, before their eyes.

"It's entertainment while you eat," said Lee Keefer of Osceola, who was spending her birthday there recently as the guest of Arnold and Jackie Werbrouck of

Mishawaka.

Jackie Werbrouck likes it for another reason, unique to this style of restaurant.

"When you go out to eat you

don't know how they prepare the food in the kitchen," she said. "But here you see everything you are going to eat prepared in front of you.

"And it's far more healthy and far more appetizing."

For Chung, who has an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University and a Ph.D. from Pacific Western University, such comments make him smile.

"We try best to give them good product and let them have a good time," Chung said. "People come and we survive. So far, so good."

It's all quite a ways from his humble beginnings busing tables at Ron of Japan in Chicago.

The late owner there, Ron Simozawa, kept moving Chung to new positions every six months, letting him learn the field. Eventually he rose to cook, where he stayed for 12 years.

It was there he saw the idea of mixing various groups together at one table.

Realistically, with six cooks and entertainment part of the fare, it's a way he has to go.

But it's also a route he believes in from observing at Ron of Japan.

"They are going to have a good experience with other people," he said. "This I find out.

"Sooner or later they say, 'oh,