



LET'S GET TAKEOUT

Saigon Noodles on Odana builds family bonds with piping-hot pho

By Victoria Davis, special to the Cap Times May 9, 2021

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Grilled shrimp with egg roll (bun tom nuong & cha gio) is a summer menu option at Saigon Noodles on Odana Road.

RUTHIE HAUGE



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Two mottos are the foundation of the Vietnamese restaurant Saigon Noodles. The first is “Miếng ngon nhớ lâu, đòn đau nhớ đời,” translated in English: “Quality matters more than quantity.”

The second is, in the words of co-owner Ann Tran, “In order to create good pho, you need a good broth.”

“It is the most important to remember,” Tran said. “It takes a long time to boil and a long time to get it right.”

Saigon Noodles, located in a strip mall at 6754 Odana Road, has been serving up steaming, stir-fried noodle dishes to the Madison community for 17 years. Tran opened the restaurant in 2004 with her brother and business partner, Henry Tran. With eight varieties of soups, like egg noodle and wonton (\$10.25), six kinds of stir-fried noodles from chicken (\$10.95) to seafood (\$13.95) as well as summer-favorite vermicelli bowls (bún) (\$9.25-\$13.45), Saigon’s noodle selection is vast.

“In the summertime, the vermicelli is very refreshing on hotter days,” said Ann Tran. She serves bún with lettuce, bean sprouts, basil and cucumber at the bottom of the bowl, chilled noodles on top.

[Thai curries, noodles and ‘treasure bags’ make a splash in Columbus]



Pho with steak, flank and meatball (phở tái, nạm, bò viên) is one of 10 options on the pho menu at Saigon Noodles, a Vietnamese restaurant on Odana Road.

RUTHIE HAUGE

Finding pho

While Madison heads slowly toward bún weather, Saigon Noodles is best known for beef broth pho (pronounced “fuh”), served at 100°F.

“It’s our number one seller and a very traditional dish,” said Tran, who is originally from Ho Chi Minh City in South Vietnam. “You can eat it in the morning or lunch or dinner, any meal. A lot of our customers are not only Vietnamese, but also Korean, Lao, Thai, Chinese. They miss their homes. This is one of the dishes that refreshes their memories.”

Pho is a Vietnamese national dish, having evolved from a noodle soup called xáo trâu, made with slices of water buffalo meat cooked in broth with rice vermicelli. Eventually, the buffalo was swapped for beef, rice noodles were added to the dish and the flavor of the broth was refined with onion, cilantro, scallion, basil, bean sprouts, lime and chili, creating the signature pho many know today. Pho has been widely adopted by other Southeast Asian cuisines, including Lao and Hmong.

All of Saigon Noodles' **pho varieties** are available or takeout, but its most popular among 10 is the steak, flank and meatball (\$10.45-\$11.75). Tran recommends the stand-alone pho tái (rare steak) for first-time pho eaters.

“If they want to get adventurous, they can try our soft tendon pho,” said Tran. Perfecting the broth, which the Trans make from scratch, takes almost a full day.

“To steam up all the bone and the fat can take from eight to 12 hours of boiling,” said Tran. “It’s a lot of work, but everyone really enjoys our food. I’ve seen customers come two or three times a week. They walk in and say, ‘Hi, it’s me again.’ And I say, ‘Don’t worry about it, just come.’”

In time for summer, Saigon has bánh mì Vietnamese sandwiches (\$9.75-\$10.75) available, with a choice of egg roll or spring roll as a combo. Tran hopes by midsummer to expand Saigon Noodles’ drink menu with a variety of bubble tea options.



Clockwise from left, grilled shrimp with egg roll (bun tom nuong and cha gio), Vietnamese spring rolls (gỏi cuốn) and pho with steak, flank and meatball (phở tái, nạm, bò viên) are a few of the menu items at Saigon Noodles.

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Rolling ahead

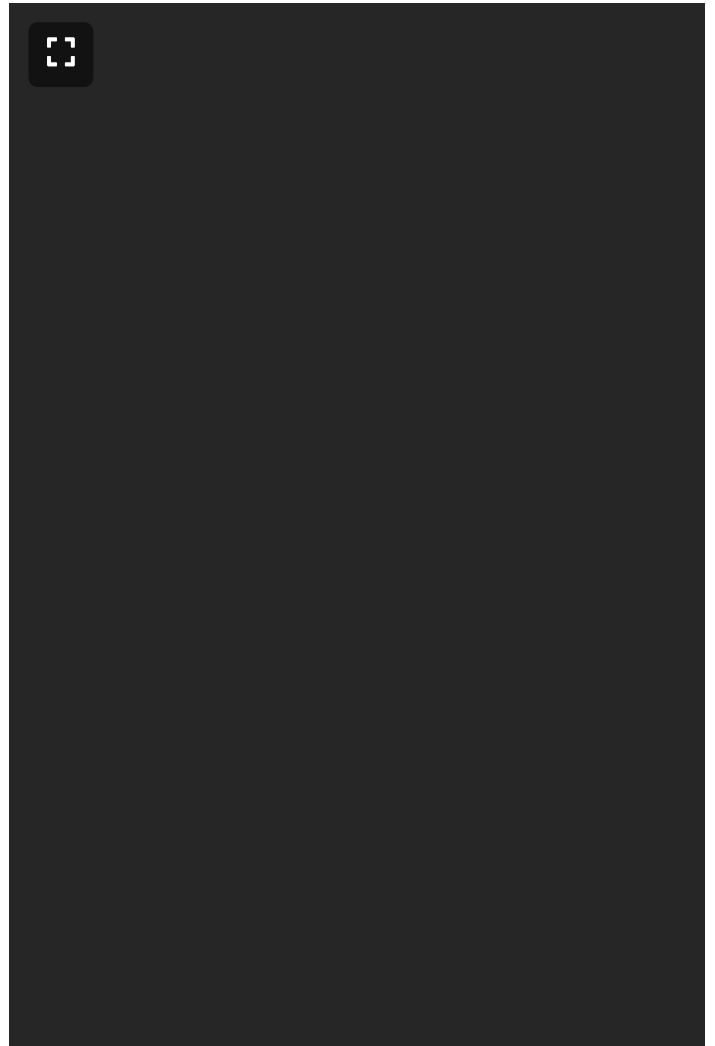
Customers who've been regulars at Saigon Noodles for almost two decades have become to Tran like family. She makes a point to spend as much time with them as her servers do. It's a mindset she says comes from having grown up in the restaurant her parents owned in Vietnam.

After moving to the U.S. in 1991 and settling in Madison, Ann and Henry Tran knew right away what they wanted to do: "share the food that we love from Vietnam with the people we love here in our second home."

With family recipes handed over by their mom, the Tran siblings opened Saigon Noodles and quickly built a community around their noodle soups, rice dishes, and the spring rolls and egg rolls (\$5.45) from their childhood.

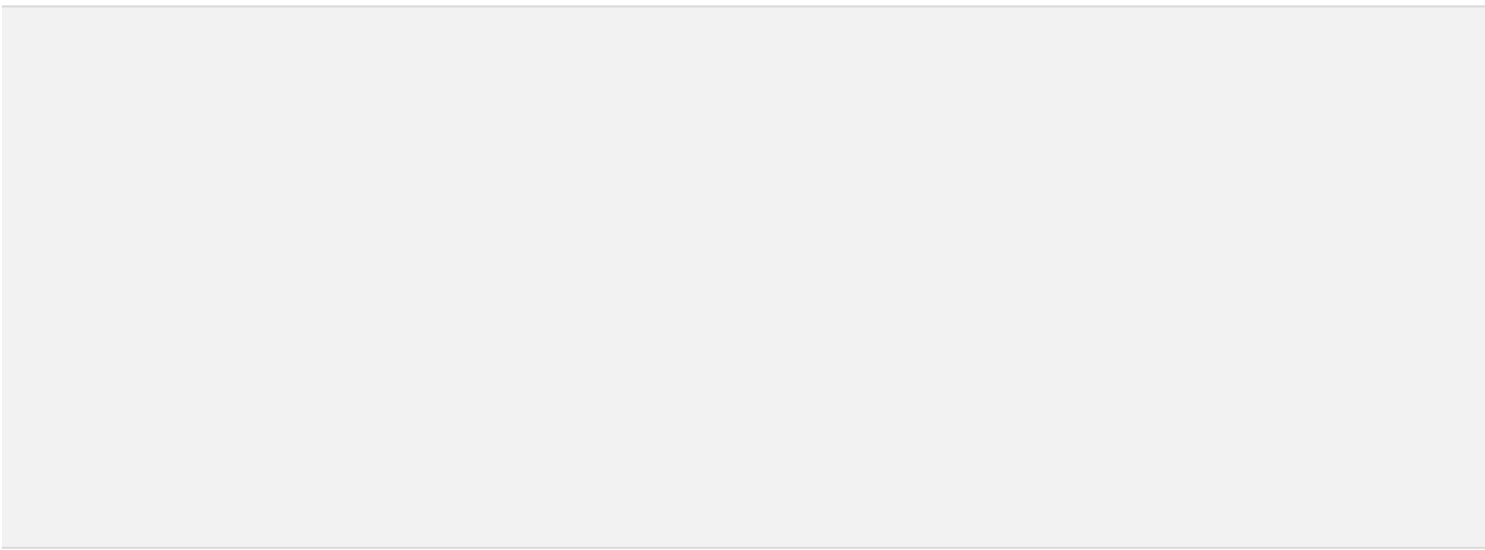
"Spring rolls and egg rolls were our mom's specialty," said Tran. "She's retired now, but mom helped out a lot when we first got started."

Now, Tran works at Saigon Noodles with not only her brother, but also her husband, sister-in-law, and 16-year-old daughter Alena Tran.



Vietnamese spring rolls (gỏi cuốn) are served with peanut sauce at Saigon Noodles.

RUTHIE HAUGE



“Some of our customers had these little kids when they first started coming in and now those kids are teenagers like Alena,” said Tran. “We have a lot of customers like that who have been

coming here for years and years, so we're just like a family now."

Tran is grateful that "extended family" got their business through the COVID-19 pandemic. With restaurants opening up more indoors, Tran is looking forward to a pho-filled family reunion.

"Two weeks ago, I started seeing faces again I haven't seen for a very long time," said Tran. "To see them come back after so long and to see they're all still healthy and doing well, I'm very grateful."

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Saigon Noodles

6754 Odana Road

(608) 827-9120

saigonnoodles.co

HOURS

Tuesday-Thursday 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m., 4-8:30 p.m.

Friday-Saturday 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

Sunday 11:30 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

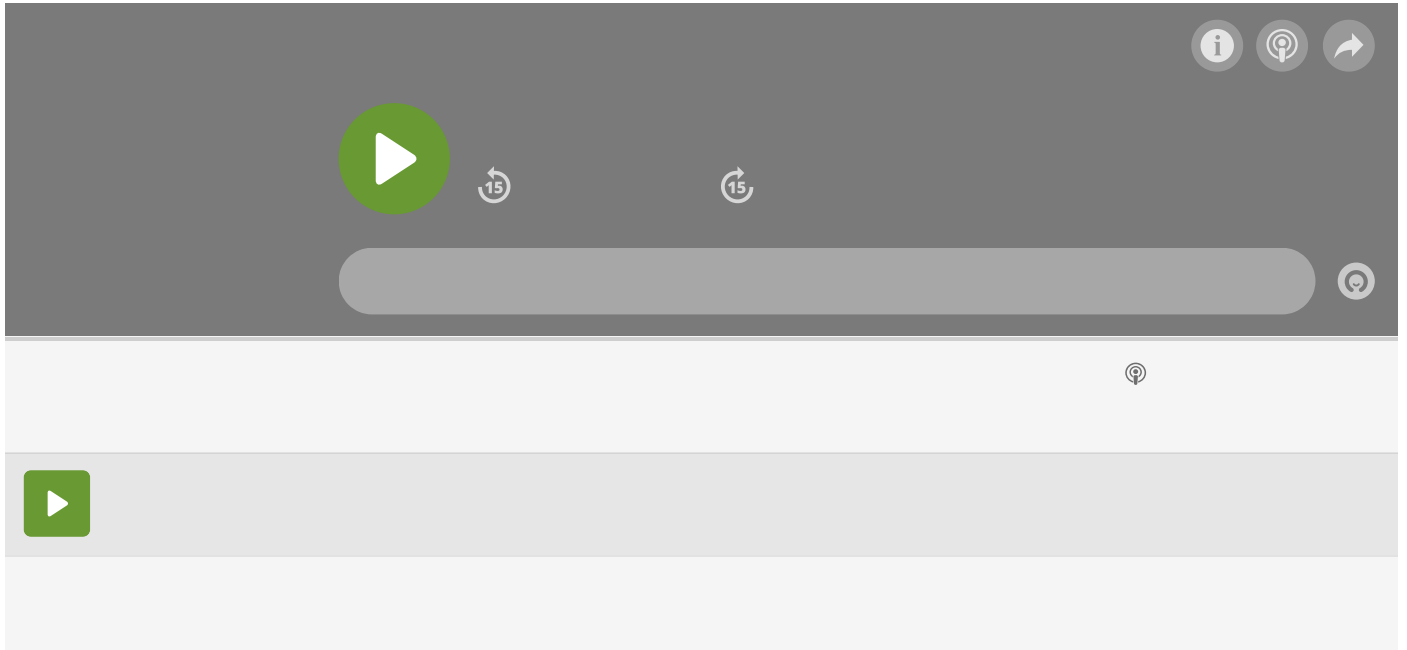
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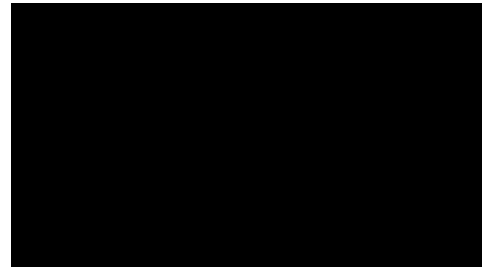
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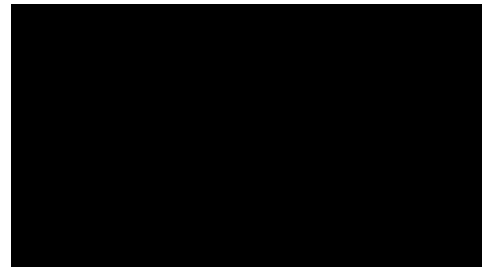
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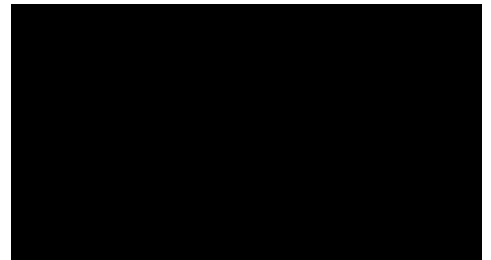
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