



NIKI PRICE
niki@oregoncoasttoday.com

Momiji: Young restaurateur delivers old-fashioned quality

A TideTables feature

When the managers of Momiji Restaurant say that all ages are welcome, they aren't just talking about the patrons. At the Chinese-Japanese eatery in southern Lincoln City Jin Tian Ye makes sushi while her granddaughter, toddler Reina, sleeps in a sling on her back.

And she isn't the only youngster behind the counter. The owner-managers of Momiji, Bruce and John Zhen, are 19 and 20 years old, respectively.

John said he gave college a try, but thought he would learn more by owning his own business.

"I dropped out of Portland State University. I'm just not a school person," he said.

He is, apparently, a business person. Raised in their family's restaurant in Keizer, the brothers now own and operate two Momiji restaurants, both in 2004, and are planning a third at the Tanger Outlet Mall in Lincoln City.

Named for the Japanese red maple leaf, the Zhens' Momiji restaurants serve mostly Japanese, including sushi and tempura seafood. In Lincoln City, they also serve Chinese food, ala carte and family style.

"We do half and half, because the previous owner in this space served Chinese, and some people just don't eat Japanese food," John said.

Still, his signature dishes are influenced by his native Japan as well as his time in Oregon. The Salem Roll, for example, is made with imitation crab, cream cheese and avocado, then deep fried and served with a sweet and spicy sauce. Also among his favorites are the Tiger Roll, with shrimp tempura and cucumber, topped with spicy tuna and avocado, and the Salmon Supreme. For those who like spicy sushi, he offers Green Shrimp Tempura Roll.

Customers are welcome to order full meals off the menu, or take part in sushi bar tradition of ordering individual rolls from a paper ticket or off the color photo menu. You can watch the sushi



being made, or crunch a plate full of edamame, lightly salted soy beans, at your own table.

Stretch your palate with Kaisou Sansai, a marinated seaweed salad, or Tako Sunomono, an octopus cucumber salad. Among the appetizers, he recommends the Broiled Oyster Misoyaki, a half-shell oyster topped with homemade red miso paste, green onion and smelt roe. The Broiled Green Mussel Misoyaki has the same, plus crab flakes.

Adventurous cooks may buy the miso in the Asian food section, but it will never taste like it does at Momiji.

"It seems simple, but without the tricks we have, it won't taste the same," he said.

The same might be said of restaurant management. John Zhen credits his parents, Jin Tian Ye and Xiong Kang Zhen, for showing him the ropes at their 30-seat restaurant in Keizer, as well as for working at Momiji today.

"I want to thank them for making this



restaurant happen, the effort they've put in," he said. "It gives this place a cozy feeling."

His father is responsible for one of the restaurant's most popular Chinese dishes, Honey Butter Shrimp. "It's a traditional Chinese dish, and the response here has been very good". Other Chinese specialties include sizzling platters with chicken, beef, pork or seafood, and Beef

restaurant happen, the effort they've put in," he said. "It gives this place a cozy feeling."

His father is responsible for one of the restaurant's most popular Chinese dishes, Honey Butter Shrimp. "It's a traditional Chinese dish, and the response here has been very good".

Other Chinese specialties include sizzling platters with chicken, beef, pork or seafood, and Beef Chow Fun, a Cantonese style with beef and vegetables.

Chow Fun, a Cantonese style with beef and vegetables.

His dedicated staff also includes Wendy Laird, who has been serving customers since the first day of business. We won't reveal her age, but unlike the owners she's old enough to serve alcohol: The restaurant serves regional wines and beers, along with Hakutsuru, Japanese plum wine, and Gekkelkan, sake rice wine (served warm in the decanter), Sapporo, Kirin Ichiban and Tsing Tao.

Japanese Fuji green tea, Jasmine ice tea and Chinese Oolong black tea are also served, along with soft drinks and water.

Zhen would also like to thank all his loyal customers who have helped spread the word about Momiji since it opened last November. One in particular is Peter Stone, who ate there the very first day, John said.

"He's a wonderful guy, and he has brought a lot of people in here with him. All the advertising I pay for is not as good as his mouth."

Stone, no doubt, has felt like one of the family at this youthful Momiji restaurant.

"We have friendly, friendly service. We treat people like family here," John said.

Open for lunch and dinner, Momiji is located at 5045 SW Hwy. 101, at the corner of SW 51st St. in the Taft area of Lincoln City. The lunch express

