

"We worked really hard to get where we are now. We put everything into this business"

—Don Chew, owner, K&D Graphics



Chew's Mix

Entrepreneur's built a mini-empire around print shop, badminton, Thai food

■ By JESSICA C. LEE

Don Chew has eclectic passions. Visit his 78,000-square-foot building on Main Street and Katella Avenue in Orange and you'll see why.

For more than 20 years, Chew quietly has built a mini-empire around his three loves: printing, badminton and Thai food.

INSIDE

Printing & Graphics
page 21

Chew owns K&D Graphics, a commercial printer that generates about \$11 million in yearly sales printing and assembling packaging materials, catalogs, flyers and other items for clients such as Irvine's Allergan Inc., Carlsbad-based Jenny Craig International Inc. and Kawasaki Motors Corp. USA in Santa Ana.

► Chew page 70

Chew

➤ *from page 1*

The other businesses at Chew's headquarters aren't as conventional.

There's the Orange County Badminton Club, a 12-court gymnasium where Olympic athletes, badminton enthusiasts and Chew's grandchildren practice striking shuttlecocks.

It's the largest badminton facility in the Western Hemisphere and hosts national tournaments.

After a challenging match or a long day of



Chew at K&D Graphics: printing business becoming tougher by the day, he says

work, badminton players and others go to Chew's other business, Bebe's Cafe. There, they can dine on Pad Thai, steak, curry and other dishes at the 96-seat restaurant that Chew named after his daughter.

Chew, a foodie at heart, tweaked the nearly 90 items on his menu to be prepared with less salt and fat. Some dishes are named after his six grandchildren.

Loves to Cook

The Bangkok native loves to cook, he said. Now and then you'll find him in the back of the restaurant stir frying noodles or sautéing vegetables next to his chef.

Together, Chew's badminton court and restaurant generate about \$1 million in yearly sales. They're as much labors of love as business ventures.

All three businesses employ some 75 workers. About 18 of K&D Graphics' 54 employees are Chew's relatives.

Running a commercial printer, badminton court and Thai restaurant under one roof raises eyebrows, Chew said.

"People think I'm crazy," he said.

But it works, he insists.

Chew runs each business separately, although they share space on a 3.2-acre lot he bought in 1994 for \$1 million in cash.

The printing business is the Chew family's bread and butter, he said.

Wife Kim, sons Montri and Gus and daughter Bebe all have worked in the business since its inception in the family's Anaheim garage in 1981.

The business, which required 18-hour days and no vacations early on, funded his children's educations and gave Chew a chance to live what he calls the "American dream."

"We worked really hard to get where we are now. We put everything into this business," he said.

The printing business also gave Chew the means to bankroll his passion for badminton. In addition to owning Orange County's only badminton club, Chew donates time and money supporting the sport, which is popular among Asians.

He sits on the board of the U.S. Badminton Association and was president from 2001 to 2005.

Last year he spent more than \$490,000 sponsoring athletes and helping them with

expenses for plane tickets and hotels.

Chew tries his best to get more Americans into the sport and criticizes the U.S. Olympic Committee for not spending more resources on badminton, which flies well below the radar compared to other sports such as gymnastics and swimming.

"He's probably the most committed person to badminton in the U.S.," said Pisan Rangsikitpho, president of the badminton association. "He'll do anything to grow the sport. He's not the kind of guy to sit back and let other people do the work. He's like that in business too, which is why he's successful."

He's committed to the sport because it changed his life, Chew said.

Chew, who is ethnically Chinese, grew up in Bangkok as a rowdy kid who stayed out late and fought.

He started playing badminton when he was 7 and got serious about it when he turned 14, he said.

Badminton kept Chew in line, he said. It helped him manage his time better among school, sports, family and friends, he said.

The sport eventually led him to his wife Kim.

The two played on the same badminton team for several years, making their rounds at tournaments in Asia.

They married in 1965 and started a printing business together in Thailand shortly after.

The Chews employed some 60 workers at the prime of their Thai printing business. But the company suffered by the early 1970s as the war in neighboring Vietnam took a toll on Thailand's economy.

So the Chews closed up shop and moved to Southern California to start a new life. It wasn't easy, Chew said.

For one, the couple had to learn how to speak English. Chew's first job was earning \$2.75 an hour staffing a conveyor belt at a beverage factory.

After saving some money, the Chews opened a tiny restaurant in Monrovia.

Long hours and inconsistent business pushed the Chews to give up the restaurant after three and a half years.

The Chews needed to find stable work to support their three children.

Chew decided to go back to what he knew best: printing. He started over from the ground up.

He took a warehouse job at a commercial printer in 1981. Around the same time, he borrowed \$5,000 from a friend and bought a small printing press so that he could make extra money printing business cards and letterheads.

He named his business K&D Graphics after himself and his wife.

Outside Chew's garage, he worked his way up at the printing company and became a supervisor.

Decision Time

Over time, Chew's home business started attracting bigger clients.

By the mid 1980s, Chew had a tough choice to make: become his own boss or keep a stable job.

The Chews sat their children down and asked them if they wanted to start a family business.

"We told them there would be a lot of sacrifice but they still wanted to do it," he said.

Sons Montri and Gus and daughter Bebe learned all about the printing business by helping their parents after school and on weekends, Montri Chew said.

By their teens, they mastered the profession, he said.

By 1987, the Chews bought an 11,000-square-foot building in Orange with a four-color press and a six-color printing press.

In 1994, Chew came across a strawberry field on Main Street that was for sale.

He bought the land for \$1 million and spent more than \$6 million on his dream building equipped with a badminton court and a restaurant so that his family wouldn't have to leave work to exercise or get food, he said.

Early Skepticism

When Chew approached the city of Orange with his design plan, he said he was met with skepticism.

"We couldn't picture how the building was going to encompass everything," said Irma Hernandez, senior assistant to Orange's city manager. "But they've done really well with their unique business model. All of their businesses run very well separately."

Hernandez, like other city workers, likes to visit Chew's restaurant for lunch. Sometimes she'll order a plate of Pad Thai and watch players practice badminton through the windows that separate Bebe's Cafe from the court next door.

"You can have Thai food and watch folks play badminton," she said. "It's one of my favorite places to go to for lunch."

Chew credits his badminton club and restaurant for saving his life.

By 1996, Chew's blood pressure and cholesterol levels skyrocketed from stress.

"I worked all the time and got really stressed out," he said. "My family kept telling me to take a break."

Chew decided to take a few years off from printing and focused on getting his health back on track.

He played badminton every day and worked in the family restaurant for fun. Chew stuck to that routine for nearly seven years before coming back to K&D Graphics after his daughter became ill.

He now works alongside sons Montri and



Chew's restaurant, badminton courts: "one of my favorite places to go to for lunch," city's Hernandez says

Gus and has a better grasp on his health this time around, he said.

Chew still likes to play badminton in the morning. His wife usually joins him.

The printing business is becoming tougher by the day, according to Chew.

The rising cost of materials, insurance and labor coupled with consolidation are among the hurdles K&D Graphics faces, he said.

Equipment isn't cheap either.

K&D Graphics counts more than 20 pieces of printing, cutting and other types of equipment on site. The company's newest edition is a \$10 million printing press that spans 125 feet and allows K&D Graphics to print two sides of a paper on one run.

The new machine isn't intended to make K&D Graphics' business explode, Chew said. It should help the company run more efficiently, which can help lower operating costs, he said.

K&D Graphics has had buyout offers in the past. Chew said he's not interested. His children and grandchildren are his exit strategy, he said.

"This is a family business," Chew said. ■