

## **SUCCESS STORY**

### **Portland District Office**

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## ***For Tommy Ogawa, Running a Business Runs in the Family***

One day, Tommy Ogawa was walking on a street in downtown Portland when a woman asked him, 'Are you Tom Ogawa?' He told her that was his father. 'Well, I went to school with him, and you walk just like him,' she said. 'I thought YOU were him!'

The younger Ogawa shares more in common with his family members than just physical attributes. He remembers making french fries with his paternal grandparents, Hank and Yo Ogawa, at their restaurant, The Polar Hut, while he was growing up. He also remembers spending summers working in a church camp kitchen in McCall, alongside his maternal grandfather, Marvin Trigueiro, a teacher with a culinary background.

When Tom Ogawa retired from teaching, he opened Ogawa's Teriyaki Hut. Tommy Ogawa later bought this, expanded its offerings, moved the location, and changed its name to Ogawa's. His sister, Chris Hicks, owns Zenbento's, a restaurant in Boise.

'I guess it runs in the family,' Tommy Ogawa said of his culinary roots. 'There are a lot of headaches in this business, but I love the people. I love meeting new people.'

In recent weeks, his patrons have included travelers from Great Britain, and California, with the latter telling him the sushi they had at Ogawa's was better than any they have had in California.

'I like coming out and meeting people, asking them about their dinners,' he said, noting he took this cue from his former employer, Salvador Sanchez, owner of Fiesta Guadalajara.

Ogawa recalled how one patron, who saw him sweeping, observed it was very professional to see an owner doing such work. 'I just told him when my staff gets real busy, I just do whatever needs to be done.'

What Ogawa is doing now includes a good bit of catering, which is fine with the Ontario native. 'Catering is,' he said, 'more profitable, because there is less overhead, and because there can be more exact planning and organization with catered orders; there is less guesswork.' Earning some especially large catering jobs has been exciting for the entrepreneur, whose clientele extends throughout the region. In addition to catering, Ogawa also teaches sushi-making classes occasionally through TVCC.

Of course, his main connection to TVCC, Ogawa said, is the help he has received from the **BizCenter**. 'I learned there's so much stuff I don't know business-wise,' he said. 'I could never have put together the business plan without Debi DeBord's help. I can't say enough about Debi.' Today, Ogawa said, when people tell him they are thinking of starting a business, he quickly refers them to assistance from the **U.S. Small Business Administration through the TVCC BizCenter**. Ogawa asks them, 'Where's your business plan? What are your projections; your estimated profit and loss?' Ogawa noted these are some of the many concepts he learned working with the BizCenter staff. Ogawa said DeBord helped him immensely, sharing these concepts without making him feel foolish.

'The thing about working with entrepreneurs is they are people who are generally very up and optimistic,' said BizCenter office manager Deb Carpenter. 'That's the great thing about Debi (DeBord). She is able to tell them everything they need to know without squelching that enthusiasm.' 'She went way above and beyond,' Ogawa said. 'And, all that advice and help was free!'

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