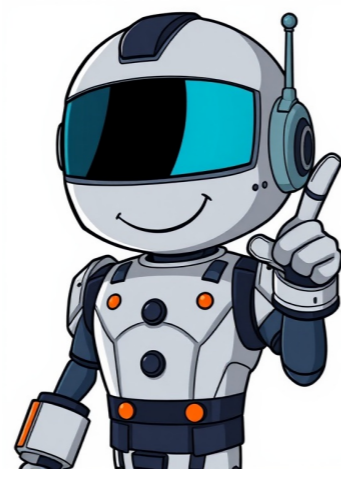


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the chef de cuisine. Even though Trotters was seen by many as the place to be for a cook, it wasn't Kims dream. It wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to do accessible food, Asian food, says Kim. I kept looking for investors for noodles, rice and dumplings, and people didn't want to do it. Finally (and thankfully), family stepped in. Kims brother was able to help with the financing for a new restaurant, and another relative owned a strip mall with a vacant location. The space was a closed taqueria. They wanted someone to rent it; it was in shambles. And I knew exactly what we wanted to do, Kim says. UrbanBelly, one of the first examples of a chef-driven noodle spot with high quality ingredients and innovative flavors, was born. It opened in 2006, and Our very first customer was Monica Eng, our third customer was Steve Dolinsky, and all hell broke loose. UrbanBelly was a true family affair. Kims wife, Yvonne, is a fine dining expert herself, and was the first woman to be a captain at Restaurant Daniel, so she took over the front of the house. Kims mother-in-law waited tables, his brother did the books, and Kim manned the kitchen. Sometimes we would see the same people come in two or three times a week, and I would fire the food before the ticket came in because I already knew what they would order, laughs Kim. After the attention that UrbanBelly got, it didn't take long to expand. In 2009, Belly Shack opened, which added a Latin twist to Kims food (it closed in 2016). In 2010, Kim started bottling and selling a line of sauces. In 2012, in collaboration with Cornerstone Restaurant Group, BellyQ opened in the West Loop on Randolph Street, with an emphasis on Korean barbecue. In 2014, Kim authored his cookbook, Korean BBQ: Master Your Grill in Seven Sauces. There are now UrbanBelly locations at Purdue University and in Brooklyn, and its still growing. For superfans, some old favorites from the original UrbanBelly, Belly Shack, and BellyQ menus will be showing up on the menu this year. Throughout it all, Kim has kept much of the same crew with him. His original dishwasher at UrbanBelly is now the chef, and these days, he focuses as much on mentorship as on cooking. We don't have kids, so everyone who has worked with us, I want them to grow, in life and business, says Kim. The UrbanBelly concept continues to grow throughout the country, in food halls and on college campuses. Kim sees these partnerships as the biggest opportunity for chefs, especially those chefs with strong brands. We as restaurateurs have to realize that our intellectual capital isn't used enough, insists Kim. International expansion is, perhaps, on the horizon. But behind it all, Kim (who is shockingly humble, given his success) credits the members of his team; his family, his cooks, and his staff. Everything I have done wasn't calculated; it was a lot of luck, a lot of hard work, and a lot of great people who helped us. Everyone thinks the restaurant business is about food; but without the people, you won't get anywhere.

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