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Sesame chicken is a popular pick at Danny's Chinese Restaurant in Massapequa.

New Chinese takeout opens in Massapequa

BY ERICA MARCUS

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'Every interview starts with the same question," Dan Antin told me when I met him and his brother at their new Massapequa restaurant. "How did two Jewish brothers come to be Chinese-takeout owners?"

I bit: How did Dan and David Antin come to own the original Danny's Chinese Kitchen in Bellmore, established in 2014, and this 6-week-old satellite in Massapequa?

In the beginning, the Antins grew up in Rockaway and Dan, the younger brother, started working in a Chinese takeout, East Meets West, there when he was 15. "I started answering phones and eventually I became manager, helped them open new stores in Long Beach and Staten Island." Then Dan went to college, got a degree in accounting, went to work for a "Big Four" firm and, eventually, found himself at Fast Retailing, the Japanese company that owns the global brands UNIQLO, Theory and GU. Burnt out and tired of travel, he wanted to change his life, and he turned to his brother for advice.

"When were you happiest?" David asked. "When I was working for East Meets West in Rockaway," Dan replied.

By now, both brothers lived in Merrick and "there's no good Chinese takeout" was a familiar lament among their friends and acquaintances. With David as a silent investor, Dan opened Danny's Chinese Kitchen, in a small shopping center on Merrick Road in Bellmore. To head up the kitchen, he asked his former Rockaway colleagues for help and they reported that Mr. Lin, one of the chefs, might be free. He was, and he brought along his brother, his cousin and his brother's wife.

Their eatery's motto was "We are not reinventing Chinese food. We are just doing it right." In the context of Nassau's South Shore, this not only meant using good ingredients and providing prompt delivery. "For us, customer service is everything," Dan said. "We handle the 'special needs' customer who says, 'I want the rice well done, no onions, no pork . . .'" Danny's also has a higher social-media profile than most other takeouts.

The coronavirus pandemic affected Danny's as it did other local Chinese restaurants. "In January, February, the beginning of March, we were down by 50%," Dan said. But while many Long Island Chinese restaurants closed in mid-March, Danny's stayed open. Once customers began to eat Chinese again, business turned around — like gangbusters. "From April to the middle of May," he said, "it was the busiest we've ever been . . ."

Months earlier, because Bellmore was doing so well, the brothers had started to think about expansion. Since cloning Dan was out, David, who was considering leaving his own successful accounting career, decided to put his mouth where his money was. On May 22, they took over the former Chow Superb Chinese Food, next to the CVS near the Massapequa Long Island Rail Road station.

The little storefront has a handful of tables and a menu that will be familiar to any resident of Nassau or Suffolk who has ever ordered Chinese takeout . . . with three exceptions: Numbers Z1 through Z4 are "zoodle" (zucchini noodle) dishes; 133 through 139 are devoted to salmon (with vegetables, in garlic sauce, etc.) and Number 22a is "pastrami egg roll."

Danny's Chinese Kitchen, 20 Broadway, Massapequa, 516-809-9970 and 2370 Merrick Rd., Bellmore, 516-783-9000; dannyschinesekitchen.com.