

Crowds flock to Bayview & St. John's for T&T Supermarket grand opening



By Brock Weir

Over 100 people eager to be among the first to walk through the doors of Aurora's newest supermarket were on the outside looking in as a colourful Lion Dance and the firing of miniature confetti cannons marked the opening of T&T.

Founded 25 years ago in British Columbia, T&T Supermarkets specializes in bringing authentic Asian food, flavours and culture to its customers across the country.

Aurora's location, located on the northeast corner of Bayview Avenue and St. John's Sideroad is among the smallest the chain, but offers myriad attractions including a wide-ranging meat counter, an expansive bakery, and what storeowners say is Aurora's largest selection of live seafood.

"This is a very special occasion for us because the last time we opened a store in Ontario was in 2012. For us to be able to open a store in Aurora is very special," said Tina Lee, CEO of T&T Supermarkets, before a crowd that included Mayor Geoff Dawe, Mayor-Elect Tom Mrakas, Councillor Sandra Humfryes, and Councillor-Elect Rachel Gilliland. "T&T was started by my family in 1993. For my mother, the former CEO, it was a vision to bring authentic Asian flavours to new immigrants in Canada, and now it has become so much more. Her first store opened in Richmond, BC and she never would have dreamed we would have stores east of Surrey, but we're now in Calgary, Edmonton, in the GTA and in Ottawa.

"Our purpose is to celebrate the Orient and bring to life all the amazing foods and flavours and culture, to Chinese and mainstream Canadians. For Chinese Canadians, we really bring them a feeling of nostalgia, almost, and homecoming. For mainstream Canadians, it is an experience of discovery and fun and joy. That is what Celebrate the Orient means to us. It is a place to connect between east and west, and I can't think of a better place than here at this intersection to do exactly that."

Ms. Lee said T&T has spent the last two years looking for a location in Aurora before signing a deal on their new location. There is also a family connection close to home, she said, in her brother- and sister-in-law, both Aurora residents, who have previously had to make the trek down to Markham for their unique products, including their house brand items.

"This is going to be a new lunch or dinner spot," continued Ms. Lee. "Normally, people don't think about a supermarket as a place to sit down and have a meal, but T&T is different in a way. You're going to love our new self-serve hot food counter. Before it used to be you had to choose two items and your rice. Now you can choose anything you want on the table because we charge by weight and you can get it yourself. Even if you can't say the name of the dish, you buy with your eyes and your stomach."

Additional unique amenities include 200 private label items, a "mushroom island" featuring 19 different kinds of fresh mushrooms, and more.

The enthusiasm was shared by Sarah Davis, President of Loblaw Companies, which purchased the T&T brand in 2009.

"Tina is an amazing business woman," said Ms. Davis. "Her parents should be so proud for the next generation taking over the store. She has done an amazing job. 2018 was a phenomenal financial year for T&T and she is proving that you can be a great business woman in retail in Canada and she has done a really great job. It is an honour for me to be here.

"I love this new smaller format. 32,000 square feet seems to me like you're going to be able to get in and get out in a quick way, get everything you possibly could need, still thousands of items, so I think the assortment is great. I hope everyone in Aurora enjoys shopping here."

Following speeches, the opening ceremony turned into a celebration of culture, featuring a lion dance, in which the local dignitaries

were invited to help dot the eyes, a ribbon cutting, and the firing of confetti cannons.

?We have watched this development come together over the last many years and know that we worked closely with the Rice Group to actually get this development together,? said Mayor Dawe. ?I would like to thank, first of all, Mike Rice and his team for the tenacity to move forward on getting this development going. There were some challenges on this particular piece of property. They did a great job. My congratulations and thanks to T&T for locating in Aurora. It really is an indicator of how our Town is changing and how we are growing and diversifying and the fabulous diversity that we achieve out of that, and some of those elements that make our town really so unique.?