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Dae Gee Korean BBQ Gears Up for Growth

THE KOREAN BARBECUE BRAND HAS FIVE STORES IN COLORADO AND WILL OPEN FIVE MORE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE U.S. BY THE END OF 2023.

When Denver native Joseph Kim acquired what would become Dae Gee Korean BBQ, he had zero experience in the restaurant industry. Now, the Korean barbecue brand has five stores in Colorado and will open five more locations across the U.S. by the end of 2023. Though Kim had a learning curve when it came to the foodservice industry, he opened small businesses with his parents growing up, which helped him gain an entrepreneurial spirit at a young age. Kim noticed that first-generation immigrants like himself typically focus on mom-and-pop style restaurants, but with Dae Gee BBQ, Kim saw the opportunity to grow the concept into something bigger through franchising and branding. Dae Gee Korean BBQ serves all-you-can-eat Korean barbecue with traditional Korean recipes from Kim's executive chef and mother-in-law, Nam Hee Kim.

Simplicity Made Different

There are a lot of different chefs who can make good styles of barbecue. Our model is very simple—we're focusing on higher-quality food with fewer menu items. When you come into one of our establishments, it's very welcoming. It doesn't look like a mom-and-pop, it looks like a franchise, so it throws a lot of consumers off. They feel comfortable in our atmosphere, but sometimes question the authenticity of our food. My big goal when I started was maintaining authenticity, but being very trendy about how we present ourselves.

Entering A New Market

When I was younger, there were probably two Korean barbecue restaurants in the Denver metro area. In Colorado in general, there might have been 10. There wasn't a huge presence; also, there wasn't a huge density of the Korean population. But I didn't want to focus on the 40,000 Koreans in this market. There were about 4 million Coloradans at the time, so I asked, "How do I reach that market?"

Franchising Made Easy

The franchisees do not have to have any cooking experience. All of the foods are marinated, and all the sides are prepped with our co-packers and shipped directly. I think that component is very appealing, because Korean food is hard to replicate and to be consistent. The look of our brand exemplifies the franchise model, as well as the food—it's consistent. So it's easier to take on versus someone trying to learn how to make kimchi and ferment.

Beyond the Border

Mexico is a huge market, [and] I think it's an underserved market. (Kim hopes to finalize the brand's first location in Mexico by November.) I think Korean barbecue or just Korean culture in general has exploded in the last 10 years, from K-pop to K-drama. But I think food is just right around the corner, and everyone's getting interested in that aspect. I think we're just positioning ourselves in a lot of newer markets because I think a lot of the consumers across the world are familiar with it.