

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

Pharmacists Turn Sights To Halal Food

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ALIYYA SWABY PHOTO; Yeungs.

Jenah and Jack Yeung both will go from helping run family stores as children to owning their own store of the popular franchise “The Halal Guys” coming this fall.

Trained pharmacists and amateur foodies, the Yeungs will enter the food business for the first time, bringing the popular New York City restaurant to its first location in the state of Connecticut.

Though he’s never sold food before, Jack Yeung said he spent a lot of time eating at The Halal Guys over the last 20 years. During a job at an attorney’s office in Manhattan, he

frequented the store's midtown location, hopping at the back of the long line snaking out of the building. When he got a call recently from a friend who said the company was franchising, the couple jumped at the chance.

The 906 Chapel St. store is still under construction across from the Green, with electrical wires curled on the dusty ground, and bright red tiles adjacent unfinished plaster. By September, about 30 employees will help to run a store that seats 50 people and serves halal Mediterranean food — including a famous “white sauce” with secret ingredients.

Jenah Yeung grew up in Ifugao, a rural, landlocked province in the Philippines, that felt like the “boonies” once her parents moved her to Queens, N.Y. at 10 years old.

The move from Ifugao to Queens Boulevard was “really surreal,” she said. In Ifugao, her parents had owned the town's general store, and she worked the register from the age of 6. Her grandmother was a teacher, who taught her and her cousins English, to prepare them for the expected move to the United States.

“A lot of my cousins ended up coming here,” she said. The early English tutelage gave her an edge once she came to New York. She skipped a couple of grades, finishing high school at the age of 16.



Outside the under-construction storefront space.

Jack Yeung is not an immigrant, but he came pretty close. His parents and siblings came to New York from China. He was born and raised in New York City.

The two were in the same city for years, but didn't meet until they attended St. John's University, both enrolling in the pharmacy program. After graduation, they moved to Branford, where they fell in love with nearby New Haven and its cuisine.

Still, they didn't think about getting into the food business just yet. They worked in the "corporate pharmacy" world for a few years, before opening their own pharmacy in Danbury. Jack Yeung has another pharmacy in Southbury and another in the Bronx.

They started their own businesses after noting they could offer many services that Walgreen's wasn't offering to improve the customer experience. Jack Yeung said he realized chain stores do not usually offer free delivery services for patients who need them, such as children and the elderly.

Some people "are not in a position to travel," he said. Their new pharmacies offer that service as one of the ways to improve the customer experience, he said.

He said they plan to bring that focus to their store by encouraging a genuine feeling of hospitality for customers who enter seeking a meal. "People can sense a genuine greeting versus one that's more transactional," he said.

He wants the restaurant to "fill a void" that doesn't exist, of fresh Mediterranean food with quick service and a unique taste.