

# The Year of the Noodle

By Elizabeth A. Reid

A woman stands outside a restaurant eyeing a sign, confused. “Noodles,” the sign simply read. She pauses for a second and walks inside.

From back behind the cash register, a hostess asks, “For here or to go?” The woman looks around the small, cozy space decked out with wood floors, wood tables and wood panels, undecidedly. She asks to see the menu.

The restaurant owner bustles out of the kitchen and greets the other four customers, as he watches the woman flip the menu over and over.

“That’s okay, thank you!” she tells the waitress behind the register, as she drops the paper menu and then leaves. The other four customers, after a few smooth slurps, finish their meals. The doorbell dings behind them and suddenly the quaint restaurant is empty.

This year was supposed to be the year of the noodle. CNN and James Oliver Cury, executive editor of Epicurious, CondeNet’s food Web site, publicly proclaimed that noodles would become the hot new item beating out sushi. If there wasn’t a new noodle bar near you, Cury wrote on his 2009 food trends blog, one would be popping up soon.

There’s a reason for that: according to the Wells Fargo Consumer Price Index, raw fish prices, along with meat and poultry, overall increased by 7.7

percent of the rising costs of energy and transport, while the cost to make noodles is comparatively low. Anyone can walk into a supermarket and find a deal for Ramen noodles, as low as 10 packs for \$1.

According to Nissin Foods Holdings, the makers of the Top Ramen and Cup Noodles brands, 4 billion individual packets of ramen were devoured in the U.S. and 3.2 billion worldwide in 2008, a 4 percent increase from 2006. “Hard economic times are good news for instant noodle makers,” says Nissin’s CEO Koki Ando to Reuters UK. “Our business grows when the economy is in recession.”

But this success has not spilled over to Marshall Street. Noodle bars are opening in Syracuse – Nothing but Noodles in Dewitt and Inside on the Hill have opened in the past year – but regular patrons aren’t coming. At least, not on Marshall Street.

At 121 Marshall Street, the former location of the now sushi joint Bleu Monkey Café, lies a small space with six tables and a wait staff of two. Guests can create their own meal by choosing a type of noodle, a type of broth, and any extra meat, vegetable or seafood.

Chef Andy Tsang, also the owner of Bleu Monkey Café, opened the restaurant last April but quickly had to close the following month. Since then, the restaurant has opened and closed two other times – opening

last September and closing the following November, then opening again in February and closing for spring break. Tsang claims he doesn’t have the staff and the business to keep the restaurant continuously open.

“There’s not enough help. When you close you don’t need to pay for the staff, the gas or the electricity,” he says. “I don’t want to waste the space, so I close.”

His other restaurant, the Bleu Monkey Café, has so far avoided the chopping block despite the recession and the projected noodle trend. On the right night, the place is buzzing with students catching up over a meal. They may not be ordering the same number of rolls, he says, but the amount of guests is the same.

So what’s next for the Tsang restaurants? The Bleu Monkey can look forward to new sushi and sake. “I hope to, after the semester, add different items to the menu,” says Tsang. “I want to apply for a liquor license so people can have sake with their sushi.” The restaurant owner also plans to add permanent karaoke to the restaurant, adding that he’s hosted the form of entertainment in his basement before. As for the noodle eatery, Tsang believes the restaurant is a good idea, but needs more promotion. “Especially in the winter, hot noodles will warm you up,” he says. “When everything is right, I’ll put up a big sign.”

illustration by Jaclyn Reyes

## Know Your Noodles



With all these noodle bars opening in the Salt City, we want to make sure you know how to order to your taste. Here are different types of Asian noodle dishes – slurp up!

### Udon

This hot Japanese noodle dish features a thick wheat-floured noodle, marinated in mild-flavored broth. Soy sauce and thinly chopped scallions are often added.

### Pho

A traditional Vietnamese dish, this noodle soup is made with beef broth, al dente rice noodles, and the occasional onions, basil and sprouts for taste.

### Ramen

This Japanese dish originated in China and is served in a meat-based broth. Ramen noodles are typically made with wheat flour, salt and water and come in a variety of sizes and shapes.