



**DIVERSITY
ALONG THE
OLIVE LINK**
A PROFILE
OF ETHNIC
ENTREPRENEURS



The Olive Link, a four-mile stretch of Olive Boulevard in University City, links Greater St. Louis to the rest of the world through the diverse ethnicities of its business owners. The Link features an eclectic retail and dining scene led by entrepreneurs who are immigrants or recent descendants of immigrants. By combining their cultural contributions with their business skills, these entrepreneurs reflect the spirit of openness and economic opportunity that define University City as a “Neighborhood to the World.” Here are a few of the stories behind businesses that populate The Olive Link.



MERHABA

Nick Menghessa, an Eritrean immigrant and entrepreneur, has taken over a restaurant called Queen of Sheba, which provided authentic Ethiopian cuisine, and renamed it Merhaba, which means “hello” in Arabic. Luckily, East African food can still be found at the location that Queen of Sheba left behind.

Merhaba’s roots lie in Eritrea, which was once part of Ethiopia until it gained independence in 1991. There Nick grew up among the Tigrinya, one of several ethnic tribes inhabiting the region. Throughout his childhood, Nick gained an appreciation for cooking after seeing how food could bring people together. He also learned a great deal about Eritrean cuisine’s influences, from its similarities and differences with Somali cuisine to the Ottoman and Italian influences obtained from the region’s colonial history.

In adulthood Nick would apply his culinary knowledge to opening a restaurant in Sudan. After three years of operating the restaurant,

Nick left Sudan for Nairobi, where his father was arranging for his family to emigrate to the United States on a diversity visa. In 1997, Nick and his family came to America and settled in St. Louis. As he explored St. Louis’s cultural attractions, Nick came across the Delmar Loop. The Loop’s entrepreneurial spirit inspired Nick to open another restaurant, and when he learned that Queen of Sheba’s owners were leaving the business, the opportunity was too good to pass up.

No matter where you’re from, you’ll find something great at Merhaba. You can also rent out the restaurant for weddings, birthday parties, baby showers and other gatherings. A huge component in Eritrean and Ethiopian dining is social interaction, so Merhaba is the perfect place to come together with family and friends for a celebration.

→ 6665 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 833-4477
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/MERHABASTL



OLIVE GREEN INTERNATIONAL CUISINE

The story of how Christine Sseremba's life led her to Olive Green International Cuisine is a perfect illustration of the truth that how knowledge of an owner's background can elevate a business from great to unforgettable. Christine grew up in a suburb of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. Intelligent, inquisitive and creative, Christine studied sociology, religion and philosophy in college and planned to use her education to become a writer.

While Christine was still adjusting to post-college life, her sister introduced her to a theater producer. Over time, Christine and the theater troop gained a fair amount of acclaim in the Kampala area and eventually the troop amassed enough resources to tour the world. She gained a great deal of business experience when she took over management of the troop's public relations in these foreign markets.

In 2004, Christine leased a building from the Uganda government, purchased several computers and

started her own IT training business. Unfortunately for Christine, the government took an interest in the land that Christine's building sat on and sent several men to warn Christine that she should vacate the premises. When Christine arrived at her building one morning, she found it being demolished. It was the most traumatic experience of her life.

With her safety at risk, Christine decided to come to the United States with her youngest son. Despite struggling with the trauma and depression induced by the tragedy in Uganda, Christine held onto hope. It was during this time that Christine discovered an intrinsic pleasure in feeding others, and she began to toy with the idea of opening her own restaurant. The idea slowly became more defined, and eventually Olive Green was born and joined the ranks of the Olive Link's unbeatable ethnic restaurant scene.

→ 8615 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 942-8730
OLIVEGREENINTERNATIONAL
CUISINE.BUSINESSCATALYST.COM/



DAO TIEN VIETNAMESE BISTRO

Diane Bui, the owner of Dao Tien Vietnamese Bistro, grew up in Saigon, where her family owned a restaurant. Her grandmother, and later her mother, ran the restaurant, so Diane was constantly exposed to the challenges and responsibilities that come with managing a small business. Unfortunately, Diane's family was forced to leave Vietnam during the Indochina refugee crisis. They arrived in the United States in 1992 and settled in Dodge City, Kansas.

Although the family restaurant was left behind in Vietnam, Diane followed in her mother and grandmother's footsteps when she opened her own restaurant in 1994. In addition to starting her own business, she also married a fellow Vietnamese refugee who arrived in 1989. After running her restaurant for several years, Diane sold it to her cousin so that she and her husband

could move to the St. Louis region. After they settled in, her husband started a construction business while Diane spent some time working in the nail salon industry. Eventually she decided to get back into the restaurant business and opened Dao Tien in 2012.

Speaking of the restaurant, you'll find the food as amazing much as Diane's story. A variety of spring rolls, egg rolls, sandwiches, noodles and rice platters are available alongside seafood, vegetarian options, and Vietnamese smoothies and desserts. There are countless other offerings on the menu as well. The lemon grass chicken is a must try, along with their numerous soup bowls. With all of these options, you'll have every reason to stop in repeatedly to try something new.

→ 8600 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 995-6960
DAOTIENBISTROSTL.COM/



OLIVE SUPERMARKET

Located in The Olive Link's International District (home to St. Louis's China Town), Olive Supermarket boasts a huge assortment of fresh and live seafood and a vast selection of Asian groceries.

It's no surprise that people fall in love with Olive Supermarket. The store offers a plethora of delicious products that you can't find anywhere else. As the largest Asian grocery store in the St. Louis region, the store carries over 20,000 products, with roughly 80 percent of them being Chinese and the other 20 percent being from the rest of Asia.

In addition to the supermarket, the building that houses Olive Supermarket also contains Yummy17, John's very own restaurant. John opened Yummy17 after customers repeatedly suggested that he open a food court in the store. The restaurant offers all of the delicious Chinese food you would expect

from a U City Chinese establishment, so if you ever need to grab a bite before you go grocery shopping, Yummy17 has you covered. Of course, if you live too far away to shop at Olive Supermarket frequently, or if you simply prefer to order your groceries online, John also has an online store called Yummy99. The online store carries several of Olive Supermarket's non-perishable items, so it's a convenient alternative for those who can't go to the store's physical location.

If you shop frequently at Asian supermarkets, you'll be impressed by the selection of quality brands and the diversity of cuisines that the store supplies. So stop by Olive Supermarket the next time you're in the Olive Link. Once you do, you'll be hooked!

→ 8041 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 997 5168
WWW.STLOUISUPERMARKET.COM
WWW.YUMMY17.COM



ST. LOUIS FISH AND CHICKEN GRILL

Originally from Sudan, Muhammed immigrated to the United States in 2005 after completing an accounting degree. After a five year stay in Chicago, he moved to St. Louis in 2010 to be closer to family, working many odd jobs in order to make ends meet. In April 2015, he moved to 8613 Olive and became manager of the St. Louis Fish and Chicken Grill. However, Muhammed's dreams do not stop there! In addition to managing the restaurant, cooking the food and overseeing employees, Muhammed hopes to go back to school later this year to obtain his CPA.

"I am constantly pushing to be better," says Muhammed. "I especially want to develop the website for the Grill, to get people really excited about our great food."

The St Louis Fish and Chicken Grill is known for its delicious – you guessed it – fish and chicken, but is also noted for the fantastic Philly steaks and gyros. If customers are looking for a healthier option, they can try baked tilapia or a classic Greek salad. Parties are welcome at the St. Louis Fish and Chicken Grill, where 50 pieces of Buffalo or BBQ Chicken are only \$25.00.

"Olive is good for food because there's a lot of activity – a lot going on," says Muhammed. "But I stay here to eat if I'm in the restaurant, I don't need to go anywhere else!"

→ 8613 OLIVE BLVD.
 (314) 695-5820
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/STLFC



DE PALM TREE

Jamaica is a great place for a tropical beach getaway. The sand is white, the water's blue, and the forests are vast and lush. Oh, and the food is unbelievably delicious. Wouldn't it be nice if someone could bring a small piece of Jamaica to University City? Well, Easton Romer, the Jamaican-born owner of De Palm Tree, has done just that. While the beaches and the forests couldn't make it through customs, Easton was able to bring authentic Jamaican recipes all the way to The Olive Link.

Easton was born in St. Andrew, Jamaica, a parish on the southeast side of the island. He moved from St. Andrew to University City in 1989 and has remained in St. Louis County ever since. After graduating from high school, Easton went to school to study computer electronics, but he left after realizing that

he felt no passion for the subject. In the following years, he spent some time working as a server, host, and cook at various area restaurants.

Since there were very few Caribbean restaurants in St. Louis, Easton became interested in opening his own. His grandmother had taught him how to cook traditional Jamaican food when he was a child, and that fact combined with his experience in the restaurant business gave him the confidence to take the plunge. In 2004, Easton and his wife Tammy opened De Palm Tree in Jeffrey Plaza, which is located in the Interchange District of The Olive Link.

It's clear that De Palm Tree won't be leaving us any time soon, so anyone who is interested in Caribbean cuisine should definitely give it a try. It's all but certain that your first time eating there won't be your last.

→ 8631 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 432-5171
WWW.DEPALMTREESTL.COM



MOUND CITY SHELLED NUT COMPANY

There's a stereotype that Greek-Americans make their livings in one of two ways: owning a restaurant or owning a store. Byron and Stacy Smyrniotis, owners of Mound City Shelled Nut Company, are proud to embrace that stereotype.

Mound City originally opened in 1917 in the Delmar Loop. After the passing of founder Henry Kessel, his wife sold the company to Byron Smyrniotis in 1973. An engineer by trade, Byron planned to own the company only for a year or two before selling it. Four decades later, he and Stacy are still running it and have no intention of letting it go.

It's no surprise that people from U City want to see Mound City succeed. The store is a rare gem in that it is completely focused on selling salted and unsalted varieties of every popular variety of nut, from almonds to pistachios to pecans. You can also find several chocolate covered offerings. Additionally, the store has its own exclusive peanut butter that is made from toasted fancy peanuts. The peanut butter is all natural. No preservatives. No artificial flavorings. Just creamy deliciousness.

→ 7831 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 725-9040
WWW.MOUNDCITY.COM



LU LU SEAFOOD & DIM SUM

Jerry, Li, who studied engineering at Tongji University in Shanghai, designed bridges and led development projects in Kenya, received a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering from Washington University, operates Lu Lu Seafood & Dim Sum with his wife, Jenny, and their daughter, Julia. Jerry opened Lu Lu Seafood sixteen years ago, and it has been one of the most popular Chinese destinations in U City ever since.

In an era where Chinese cuisine is associated with both small, authentic ethnic restaurants as well as large "Americanized" chains, Lu Lu Seafood stands out. Whereas most Chinese restaurants, authentic or Americanized, purchase their seafood frozen, Lu Lu Seafood purchases its seafood live from Seafood City to ensure quality and freshness.

In addition to seafood, Lu Lu Seafood offers a diverse range of traditional meals from several

different Chinese regions. Adding to the authenticity of its offerings, LuLu's employs four main chefs from different regions of China to prepare its meals. Each chef specializes in the cuisine that originated in the region that they are from. The cuisines represented on LuLu's menu originate from Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing, and Sichuan. In addition to its regional chefs, LuLu employs two dim sum specialists who handcraft all of the dim sum offerings.

The award-winning LuLu Seafood and Dim Sum was among the first Chinese restaurants to open on a stretch of Olive Boulevard that is something of an emerging China Town, and its longevity of sixteen years is testament to the fact that the family knows how to do business.

→ 8224 OLIVE BLVD.
(314) 997-3108
[WWW.LULUSEAFOOD
RESTAURANT.COM](http://WWW.LULUSEAFOODRESTAURANT.COM)



U CITY FOOT MASSAGE

Enter U City Foot Massage, owned by Liling Wemhoener. Friendly, high-energy, and entrepreneurial, Liling has lived in U City since 2006, but her ties to the city go back further than that. In 2001, she opened Shu Feng Restaurant on Olive Boulevard. She owned the restaurant for fourteen years, and during that time it became one of the most popular Chinese restaurants in U City.

Helping others is a huge part of Liling's life. She's provided assistance at Wei Hong Seafood Restaurant and at the Mandarin House many times. Determined to find a new way to help people, she opened U City Foot Massage earlier this year.

Liling and her employees practice foot massage techniques that are based on reflexology. A form of alternative medicine, reflexology

posits that specific parts of the foot correspond to different parts of the body (for example, the middle of the big toe is said to correspond to the cerebrum; the middle of the sole, to the kidneys). In theory, applying pressure to a specific part of the foot can stimulate and relax the associated body part. It is traditionally held that reflexology can improve health by balancing one's life energy, or chi as it is called in Chinese culture.

The typical session at U City Foot Massage begins with a foot soak. Once your feet have finished soaking, the therapist will proceed to massage every inch of your feet: the soles, the toes, and even the heels. While the therapist works, all you have to do is recline in the big, comfy massage chair and enjoy life.

→ 8431 OLIVE BLVD
(314) 325-5297
WWW.UCITYFOOTMASSAGE.COM

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON THE OLIVE LINK, VISIT:
WWW.THEOLIVELINK.COM**

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