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ENTERTAINMENT

'Juicier than American style': New Korean fried chicken restaurant is open in North Quincy



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The Patriot Ledger

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QUINCY – South Korea's famous b.bq Chicken is open in North Quincy, serving fried chicken that is nothing like the KFC you might be used to.

This KFC – Korean fried chicken – is "crispy and tender, juicier than American style," said Jacky Zheng, owner of bb.q Chicken on Billings Road.

The restaurant opened Feb. 3 and between online and telephone orders and in-house dining (there's about a dozen seats) always seems to be busy, even at 3 p.m. on a recent Friday.

"We were packed," Zheng said.

Juicy and crispy

Indeed, Korean fried chicken is taking Quincy by storm – one juicy wing at a time. That's no surprise, however. Bb.q Chicken is an internationally known franchise with a cult-like following. Locally, customers from as far as Cape Cod make the drive for takeout, Zheng said.

Breakfast tacos, apple pie French toast: Skillet in Weymouth serves a tasty experience

The menu includes fried chicken in two dozen flavors; kimchi fried rice; ddeok bokki, a simmered rice cake; fried dumplings; corn salad; and other offerings. But it's the wings – \$12 for 8 pieces, \$23 for 16 pieces, and \$34 for 24 pieces – that have taken flight. Zheng said the bestsellers are the golden original fried chicken with its crunchy crust and honey garlic crispy-fried chicken coated in a sweet and savory sauce. The secret-spiced hot wings are also a favorite, Zheng said.

Korean fried chicken is well known among the Asian community. American palates might be late to the party, but they're catching up. The difference? Korean style is lighter, crispier, fried in blended olive oil and not dredged in flour or buttermilk.

"It's crispy and tender, juicier than American style," Zheng said. "Many non-Asians tried and said the chicken tastes better than they thought."

And most of those people didn't even come in for fried chicken, Zheng says with a laugh. "A lot of customers came in asking for the barbecue chicken," he said. "But our 'bb.q' stands for 'best of the best quality.'"

Famous from Asia to America

Bb.q Chicken was founded in Seoul, South Korea, in 1994. It is indelible in Korean culture, making multiple appearances in Korean TV series and movies. One of Zheng's customers came to try the chicken because he saw the brand in a Korean TV show. The first U.S. franchise opened in 2014. A website called Nation's Restaurant News ranked bb.q Chicken among the fastest growing chains in the nation with more than 50 locations.

'A real Italian experience': Quincy's Italian Cafe Gelato adds pizzas, looks to expand

Zheng migrated to the US from Fujian, China, in 1998. He did not speak English when he arrived, but he found his first job in a kitchen at an Asian restaurant.

"I like to cook. I like to see people enjoy my food," he said. "That's how I came into the restaurant business."

He has worked at about eight restaurants over the past two decades after moving to Boston in 2000. When the pandemic crippled the dining business, Zheng said he decided to give a chain restaurant a try and opened the Kenmore Square spot in December 2021.

"It was an opportunity for us to bring in some different cultures," Zheng said. "I love Korean food."

Zheng said each chicken order is freshly prepared. A customer orders, the chicken is dipped in the crunchy coating and fried for about 15 minutes. Zheng said the chicken is worth the wait.

A promising future

Zheng and manager Jimmy Wen have about 15 employees rotating on shifts at the North Quincy store. They run between Quincy and Kenmore Square each day and a new store in Cambridge is scheduled to open this fall. Additional locations are in Allston and Lowell. There are also franchises in two dozen other states, including California, New York, Rhode Island, Texas and Florida.

Zheng said his goal is to have fried chicken restaurants all over Massachusetts.

"It's one-of-a-kind Korean fried chicken in the United States," Zheng said.

If you go

What: bb.q Chicken

Where: 60 Billings Road, Quincy

Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily

Info: 617-786-8788 or bbqchickeneats.com/northquincy

Fried clams and waterfront views: After 73 years, Jake's in Hull stands the test of time

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