

Fresh Food & Good Vibes

written & photographed by **CHRISTINA NIFONG**

Asian-inspired pop-up Love + Umami is hitting its groove.

Amy Ngo welcomes customers with a wide smile, easily explaining *pho* (a Vietnamese broth base) and *ube* (a Filipino purple yam), while her husband Kevin Jeon scoops tofu and sprinkles sesame seeds under a big black tent at a Roanoke brewery. The couple works together like contrasting flavors in a tasty dish.

Ngo teaches chemistry at an area college and once dreamed of attending culinary school. Jeon has a long track record of working with food businesses in the Washington, D.C., area. A year ago, they moved to Lynchburg and in March 2026 they launched Love + Umami, a pop-up offering Asian-inspired rice bowls and desserts.

The business has taken off, with bookings at Lynchburg-area farmers markets and breweries,

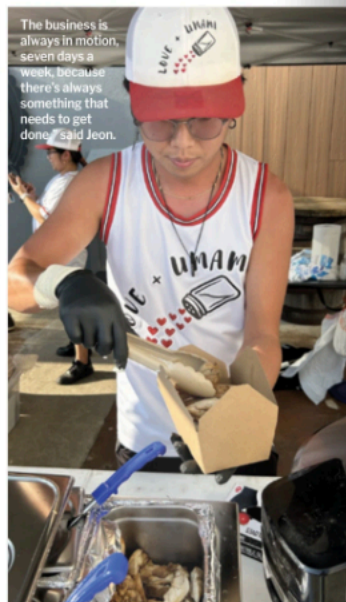
Roanoke workplaces and events, and a scattering of spots in between.

For \$10, customers get a choice of four proteins (tofu, pork, beef, or chicken), up to seven toppings (such as cucumbers, cilantro, and fried onions) and a choice of drizzles (peach soy, spicy mayo, sweet heat—or a combination). Desserts are \$7. Everything is made in-house—the marinades and sauces, even the sponge cake that's the base of the desserts. It's a way to serve the freshest food and guard against hidden allergens, which is



ABOVE, TOP TO BOTTOM: The couple brings complementary skills to the business. Ngo is the creative force while Jeon excels at production.

Their typical pop-ups offer Asian-inspired rice bowls and sponge cake-based desserts, like this Spicy Mapo Tofu with Mushroom bowl and Ube + White Chocolate dessert.



The business is always in motion, seven days a week because there's always something that needs to get done," said Jeon.

important to the team. Jeon works to locally source much of the food.

Customers have become friends—sometimes following Love + Umami to multiple locations in a single week. Patrick Johnson, from Raleigh, works for CVS and frequently travels to Central Virginia with his job. He first stumbled on Love + Umami at a Lynchburg event and was so taken with their meals and welcoming feel that he began to seek them out whenever he was in the area. "You can count on the food being really good," he said between bites of his Tom yum pork chili rice bowl. "It really does make you want to come back."

As the weather cools, Ngo and Jeon are hoping to schedule more catering events and add new options to their menu. But they say no matter what else they might do, popping up throughout the region will always be part of their model.

"I like to connect to the community and chat and support other businesses," Ngo said, sharing a beer with customers as the night wound down. "It's been a fantastic way for us to get to meet people." ☆