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GOOD AND SPICY: Michael Wang, owner and manager of Fómami Asian Sandwich Bar in Boston, shows off his chili pepper chicken sandwich.

STAFF PHOTO BY JOHN WILCOX

Healthy Asian fare helps fuel transformation of fast food

By CAMERON SPERANCE

The golden arches of American fast food are tarnishing quickly thanks to the rise of healthy, ethnic fast casual cuisine.

Market research company NPD Group reports that young Americans are heading to traditional fast food outlets such as McDonald's 53 fewer times a year than they were five years ago. Instead, they are turning to the growing fast casual fare such as Chipotle and its new Asian sister ShopHouse. Many are now eyeing this movement as a prime opportunity to make a profit.

"The fast casual concept is exploding because of general lifestyle changes," Michael Wang, owner of local fast

casual restaurant Fómami, told the Herald. "People are now looking for three things: health, convenience and pleasure."

Wang studied the restaurant industry while he was working on Wall Street for Goldman Sachs. By the time he was attending Harvard for an MBA, he had started a business plan for what would become Fómami, an Asian sandwich shop.

"I observed the industry and noticed that Asian cuisine wasn't ethnic anymore and had become mainstream. Plus, there was this huge craze for fast casual concepts and sandwiches," he said.

Consumers spend \$63 billion each year on sandwiches at restaurants. Wang decided it was time for Asian cui-

sine in America to include sandwiches instead of staple dishes such as rice bowls. He looked to Shandong Province in China, which is known for its dough products, to bring a new twist to the dining scene.

"Initially, I had a concept that involved rice bowls, but I quickly noted that everyone does them. Nobody does Asian sandwiches, so my venture became one that isn't easily replicable," Wang said.

Fómami, which roughly translates to "What Buddha finds to be delicious," has been so popular that Wang is scouting for additional locations in Boston and beyond.

"Chipotle knows what they're doing. If they're branching into Asian cuisine, it's because there's a market," Wang said.