Integrating business with food, adding his own creations with a customized touch on every dish, Sam Szeto is known as “Dragon Sam” to his customers and friends.

The owner of award-winning Chinese restaurant Dragon Wok, located on the southeast corner of Cooper and Ray Roads in Gilbert, Szeto’s zeal for serving good food in a great ambiance has attracted a large clientele of business people, local celebrities, and public officials alike.

Szeto grew up in Canton, China and later moved to Hong Kong. His father was a grand master chef. Szeto’s restaurant and personalized creations draw from his father’s master cooking skills, but include Szeto’s own creations, such as his walnut shrimp, orange shrimp and chicken, Kung Pao Two and the specialty he calls the Double Dragon.

Szeto moved to the United States in 1979 and started his restaurant career in 1990. He opened four restaurants before the grand opening of Dragon Wok in February 2005. Szeto says that when he moved to America, he discovered the American perception of Chinese food is cheap, greasy and a fast snack put into a to-go box.

Besides Szeto’s deep love for Chinese food and the joy of perfecting Chinese cooking, he said one of the main reasons for creating Dragon Wok was to bring honor and dignity to his homeland China in America. All of the food made in Dragon Wok’s kitchen is made to order and always fresh.

Dragon Wok relies heavily on by word of mouth through its satisfied customers. When asked what his restaurant makes in revenue, he humbly answers, “I don’t do it for the money at all, I simply want to bring Chinese food to a high standard, to share my love of Chinese food with others. I make enough to make a living for me and my family.”

Szeto says that when he comes to work it feels like anything but. That’s because his customers are his friends — or as he calls them, “cousins.”

“There is always a party here at Dragon Wok. I always have large groups for reservations here,” he says.

His wife, Lola Szeto, has helped create the restaurant’s ambiance. Entering the doors of Dragon Wok, it feels like you have left Gilbert and arrived in China. The décor features Chinese ornaments and paper dragons. Colorful upside-down umbrellas cover the ceiling, there’s a candle on every table, bamboo window shades on each window, and lighting is low to maintain a quiet, relaxing ambiance.

Over the years, Dragon Wok has become a hot spot for local public figures. The mayor, fire chief, councilmen, town manager, NBA players, lawyers, judges and many more are regular customers. Szeto, who is usually working in the kitchen, did not realize so many public figures enjoyed his food until his customers started mentioning it.

“A lot of business meetings are held here by public officials over lunch here at Dragon Wok,” says Szeto. “People bring their family and friends here to impress them with our five-star hospitality; whenever they bring a guest my friends feel happy,” says Szeto.

Gilbert fire chief Collin Dewitt says he and his crew have been Dragon Wok regulars for about six years.

“We discovered this place on a fluke,” he said. “We just can’t stay away. About once a week we’re in the place.”

Dragon Wok has been named a Top 100 Chinese restaurant in the United States by Chinese Restaurant News while also receiving a “Best Regional Specialty award,” and Best Décor award from the organization, whose annual competition is open to all Chinese restaurants in the U.S.

As much as a priority is put on food, culture takes center stage as well; traditional dragon dances are performed at the restaurant each year during Chinese New Year.

“I am the ultimate businessman and the key to my success is that my restaurant includes these key important factors: excellent food, excellent service, high standards, ambiance, and entertainment.”

Dragon Wok Fine Chinese Restaurant has the distinction of being consistently awarded as a top 100 Chinese Restaurant in the USA since 2008. It has raised the bar of what makes an exceptional Chinese dining experience, nationwide. Dragon Wok  showcases the elegance of Chinese cooking and catering.

Dragon Wok stands out from other restaurants because of our involvement with community outreach and charity events. This has allowed us to become one of the most recognized businesses in the East Valley.