

SAFRA Entrepreneurs' Club showcased three notable local hawker businesses at hawkerpreneur seminar.

BY YONG SHU CHIANG

THE HAWKER WAY

The experiences of three speakers at the SAFRA Entrepreneurs' Club (SEC) Hawkerpreneur Seminar held on 26 May at SAFRA Mount Faber were eye-openers to entrepreneurs-to-be. SEC typically holds three or more seminars a year along with networking sessions, company visits and an annual flagship marketplace.

The three speakers came from diverse backgrounds. Anson Loo used to work in the medical field and is the proprietor of the Prawn Village stall at Ghim Moh, while Jerome Lim is a third-generation hawker whose family owns Ming Fa Fishball. Karen Hui started working for Lao Ban Soya Beancurd after she married the founder's son.

The speakers shared their own "hawker journeys" and took part in a panel discussion before taking questions from participants curious about what it takes to succeed in the hawker trade.

Coming from a family of hawkers - brother Tom is the young hawker behind Tom's City Zoom Fishball Noodles, also in Ghim Moh - Anson related the conflict he once felt.

"My grandmother told me not to join this business, because of the long hours and hard work," he reminisced. However, a passion for food, and a desire to help play a part in preserving hawker tradition and culture spurred him on to start his own stall.

Initially interested in serving oyster omelette, his move to prawn noodles earned the notice of Makansutra founder KF Seetoh. A complimentary post by Seetoh helped Anson grow his business into the success it is today.

Meanwhile, the youngest speaker of the day, 31-year-old Jerome, who worked in finance before joining the family business started by his grandfather, shared how difficult it was for him to convince his father of his views on business development.

After making innovations, such as the sale of frozen food products, diversifying dishes, and embracing social media and online sales platforms, Jerome said he was only now earning the trust of his elders in the business.

Karen's focus was on learning from customer complaints and feedback, and never compromising on standards to deliver the best product.

She shared that, to this day, Lao Ban has never granted any franchises and all of its more than 20 outlets are managed by family members or trusted friends.

Later, the audience asked about the secrets of success, such as finding good staff and securing good locations. For more info about SEC and its events, please visit www.safra.sg/sec ■

From right: Panellists Jerome, Karen and Anson answered questions from the 100-strong audience, with SEC committee member Jay Teo moderating.

