

*Alaska.* **BEYOND** >>  
FEBRUARY 2020

FEBRUARY 2020 YOUR COMPLIMENTARY COPY



FINDING  
THE WAY

NAINOA THOMPSON  
SETS COURSE FOR A MORE  
SUSTAINABLE WORLD

FOR A.D. PIONEER & 2019 AIRCRAFT INNOVATION, VEST, JAPANESE COMPANIES

#1  
IN CUSTOMER  
SATISFACTION

**GRATEFUL  
BY THE DOZEN**

AMONG TRADITIONAL CARRIERS IN NORTH AMERICA



Lemongrass Thai Cuisine.

## BANGKOK NORTH?

Fairbanks is home to two dozen Thai restaurants

By Maggy Lehmicke

» In the mid-1980s, dreams of gold drew Charlie Boonprasert and Terapong Navachai from their homes in northern Thailand to a mining claim near Coldfoot, Alaska. But when the mining operations shut down, the men were in need of work.

After a short stint as a chef in San Francisco, Boonprasert couldn't shake his Alaska dream, and he started making plans for a restaurant in Fairbanks. In 1989, with his wife Laong's support (after much persuading), and with Navachai's help, Boonprasert opened Thai House Restaurant on Fifth Avenue. It's believed to be Fairbanks' first-ever Thai restaurant.

"This was my dad's pride and joy," says Patty Boonprasert. "My dad realized there was opportunity here."

And, oh, was he right. In 1996, Navachai branched off to start his own restaurant—Lemongrass Thai Cuisine—and over the next 25 years, more than 20 additional Thai

restaurants opened. Today, there are two dozen Thai restaurants in the Fairbanks area, a region with a population of about 100,000 people, according to Explore Fairbanks. Overall, about 15% of Fairbanks' restaurants are Thai, and most of these restaurants are owned by Thai families.

"No two Thai restaurants in Fairbanks are the same," says Boonprasert. "Each has its own version of Thailand and is as unique as the people in the town."

Restaurant owners say the Thai community has grown organically through word of mouth, with families traveling to Thailand and telling others about the appeal of Fairbanks.

Boonprasert says her father, who died in 2009, would be proud to see that his impact has spread further than he could have ever imagined. He never saw the additions as competition, she says, and he would be happy that Thai House still serves some

### THAI TO GO

In addition to sit-down restaurants, there are several noteworthy drive-thru and takeout stops throughout greater Fairbanks, offering authentic Thai cuisine in express-style digs. Here are a few options:

■ **Sam's Taste of Thai:** Just north of the city, this spot serves rolls, stir-fry dishes and homemade pan-fried noodles.

■ **Shanghai Thai To Go:** One of the area's few fusion restaurants, Shanghai Thai To Go, in the northwestern part of town, serves both Chinese and Thai cuisine and has earned lots of praise for dishes such as sesame chicken.

■ **Simply Thai Drive-Thru:** This no-frills site near Fairbanks International Airport offers traditional soups, pad thai and curry dishes, in addition to a Thai omelet and stir-fried bamboo shoots.

■ **Spicy Thai By Moo:** About 5 miles east of downtown Fairbanks, Spicy Thai earns rave reviews for its pad thai, fried rice and spicy beef.

■ **Thai Orchid Drive Thru:** Crab rangoons, Thai noodle soup, various curries and a selection of pad thai dishes are on the menu at this quick stop in the northeastern corner of town.



■ **Thumbs Up Food by Gnap & PK:** In the nearby town of North Pole, this drive-thru's most popular signature dishes include its crab fried rice and almond shrimp, shown below.

*\*Some locations may be closed in winter.*



» HERE & NOW  
ALASKA

customers who have been eating there since 1989.

"Our Thai restaurants show that even in the middle of a vast wilderness, there is no shortage of diverse and delicious dining options," says Amy Geiger, director of communications at Explore Fairbanks. "The Thai food, farmers markets, breweries and distilleries are all a pleasant surprise to visitors and have really enhanced their appreciation of the Fairbanks food scene."

Some local favorite Thai restaurants include Nim's House of Thai Food, Bahn Thai and Siam Square, all of which are within 2 miles of each other.

In just two days and nights during a recent trip, I ate my way through a handful of Fairbanks' most widely regarded Thai restaurants, including Thai House and Lemongrass. At Thai House, I was greeted by two servers who have been working at the restaurant since its inception. Wearing decorative embroidered pants that Boonprasert's family brought from Thailand, the servers delivered tasty classics,



» Thai House Restaurant serves tasty dishes such as beef panang curry.

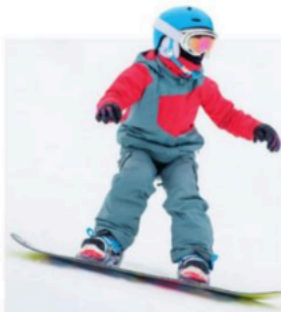
including panang curry and drunken noodles, alongside a savory beef dish.

At Lemongrass I sampled an array of intensely flavorful soups and seasonal plates, such as a pumpkin salad with a sweet-and-sour vinaigrette. As at Thai House, the artwork and decor at Lemongrass was carefully selected and rich with adornments—all an homage to Thailand.

At Pad Thai Restaurant, I savored "sidewalk

noodle soup," which has a lightly creamy broth seasoned with cilantro and fried garlic, for lunch. That same evening, I ate dinner at Noodle House. The restaurant's homemade noodles are its claim to fame, evincing a hearty, tender texture that absorbs all the flavors on the plate.

After eating the fresh rolls, spicy curry and delicious house noodle dish, I was sated, and yet I still had a taste for more. ✕



OPEN TERRAIN

Skeetawk is a community-powered ski area

By Zaz Hollander

» One of the country's newest ski areas is opening soon in Alaska. Skeetawk features a triple chairlift and 13 runs, from beginner to advanced, as well as a terrain park. The ski area is located near Palmer at Hatcher Pass, a popular recreation area in the Talkeetna Mountains, roughly an hour north of Anchorage.

Skeetawk is a true community ski hill, operated by a nonprofit and relying on grassroots support. Organizers say their goal is to run a small but affordable family-oriented destination.

"We want to work for the community, not depend on ticket sales and high prices to support us," says Amy O'Connor, executive director of Hatcher Alpine Xperience, the nonprofit that operates the area.

O'Connor says the ski-patrolled area is the kind of place where kids can learn to ski and

adults can find varied terrain. Future plans call for adding steeper runs and a quad lift, she says.

Along with major funding from the local government, the Mat-Su Health Foundation and the Rasmuson Foundation, the area received support from hundreds of community members.

Donors sponsored trails or chairs on the lift. Volunteers painted buildings, cleared brush for runs, and helped construct a large yurt that's serving as a chalet and base for a coffee shop and rentals.

More than 300 households established donor memberships before Skeetawk even opened.

"We feel supported," O'Connor says. "It's something that, as we grow, people can be really proud to be a part of." For more information, visit [skeetawk.com](http://skeetawk.com). ✕