

THE ASPEN TIMES

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Aspen City Council begins budget discussions for 2024

Staffing and rising utility/technology costs common themes among requests

Jonson Kuhn
The Aspen Times

In the first round of budget presentations with the City of Aspen, many departments requested funds for additional staff members or rising costs of utilities and technologies.

Departments for Recreation, Special Events, Community Development, Environmental Health, Aspen Police, Climate Action, and Renewable Energy Mitigation Program were specifically highlighted, with department directors providing breakdowns of budgets as well as intentions for the following year.

At least two more work sessions are scheduled for presentations from the remaining departments. A final vote on the 2024 City of Aspen budget won't come until December.



AUSTIN COLBERT/THE ASPEN TIMES

BUDGET, A9 Aspen City Hall.

Bangkok Happy Bowl focuses on feeding the community and giving back

Sarah Girgis
The Aspen Times

At a time when there are fewer affordable, locally-run restaurants in Aspen, the owners of Bangkok Happy Bowl Thai Bistro and Phatt Pho n' Sushi, Paula Rungsawang and Kirk Coult, remain committed to the community they have called home the last 12 years. "Paula was born in Bangkok,

Thailand, and had years of experience running restaurants when we met," said Kirk Coult. "One of the things we really wanted to do was bring authentic Thai cuisine to Aspen. We wanted to be a come-as-you-are type of restaurant that was affordable and high quality that locals could really enjoy."

Rungsawang began her culinary journey in Sydney, Australia in

1990 to TK. She said she always had a talent and passion for cooking and found that Australians had the desire and taste for authentic Thai food. She decided to open her first restaurant while still in graduate school.

"The Asian food in Sydney is really the same level as in San Francisco," she said. "It had to be



COURTESY PHOTO

BANGKOK, A9 Chef Paula Rungsawang and her team at Bangkok Happy Bowl.

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COURTESY PHOTOS

Paula Rungsawang and Kirk Coult have owned and operated Bangkok Happy Bowl for twelve years.

BANGKOK2

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bill for us."

Both Coult and Rungsawang said the Aspen community embraced them from day one. They recalled a long-term local who stopped in during those early days and said, "We've been waiting 17 years for a Thai restaurant, we hope you guys make it."

Twelve years later they are still going strong, with locations in Kauli and Breckenridge and a new location coming to Key West in January 2024. In addition, they opened Phatt' Pho n' Sushi in May, right next door to Bangkok Happy Bowl.

Self-proclaimed music enthusiasts, they take pride in having been a primary food vendor at JAS Aspen Labor Day Experience for the past 11 seasons and serving as a JAS Aspen Labor Day Experience Sponsor for the past two years. The relationship came about after meeting Jim Horowitz, president, and CEO of Jazz Aspen Snowmass while he was eating at the counter at Bangkok Happy Bowl several years ago.

They have also spent the last seven years hiring and providing a musical venue for Aspen Music School duos for at least fifteen evenings each summer season, and nine years providing food for the annual Tibetan Monk blessing in Aspen.

"We've had incredible support throughout our twelve years and that is what encourages us and makes us always want to give back and figure out ways to do that," said Coult.

He added that while they have other locations, Aspen is their flagship and the only place where they can't make modifications to the standard menu without an uproar.

"Every time we've said 'You know what? Maybe we'll modify the menu a little bit and remove a few items,' in Aspen, the answer is 'no way.' We don't do that. We don't even think about it anymore. Because immediately we have locals who've been coming to us for years and that's their item and they let us know right away," he said with a laugh. "Paula and I are small operators and it's a family operation. We have a wonderful team that we consider family. That's why it works."

bangkokhappybowl.com



The Bangkok Happy Bowl team at Jazz Aspen Snowmass Labor Day Experience.



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