



Leslie Klipsch  
Nho Tran, owner  
of Nho's Café.

# Nho's Café

## A tiny Q-C treasure

BY LESLIE KLIPSCH

**W**hen Nho Tran was growing up in Vietnam in the 1990s, her mother and sister did the cooking for the family. Imagine their surprise last August when Ms. Tran opened Nho's Café, a delightful Asian fusion eatery in west Davenport.

"I never cooked at home ... I just ate," Ms. Tran told me recently, grinning over her cup of hot green tea.

After earning a business degree from the University of Iowa, the pleasant Ms. Tran moved to the Quad-Cities in 2010 for a job in insurance and embraced her growing passion for cooking after hours. Mastering flavor, she began to experiment with presentation.

"I kept surprising myself," she recalled. "The food tasted good and it was pretty. I was having so much fun!" Following a few years of feeding her curiosity, cooking dinner and posting pictures on social media, she enrolled in the culinary arts program at Scott Community College to pursue her passion full time.

At Nho's Café, Ms. Tran shares her talent with a menu that features a creative twist on classic fare. She packs spring rolls with fresh avocado and fries rice in bacon. Menu staples are a mix of Vietnamese, Thai, and Chinese food, but Ms. Tran also enjoys experimenting with traditional American food, adding her own flare. A recent special, for instance, featured Beef Wellington with lemongrass and basil. Another signature take was lamb chops cooked in an Asian flavored stock and served with Asian sweet potatoes and persimmon.



Leslie Klipsch  
Spring rolls from  
Nho's Café.

“People seem to really like my food,” Ms. Tran cheerfully revealed. “This is all really going somewhere.”

The café occupies a tiny space that shares a building (and kitchen) with Roadrunner’s Roadhouse. The 26-year-old chef has plans to renovate, but for now seating is limited (on a recent visit there were chairs for only eight). The small, unadorned café fills up during lunch and dinner and does a healthy take-out business. Despite the size and simplicity of the space, the food is wonderful and the café manages a certain off-the-beaten-path charm.

### Ms. Tran’s favorites

Ms. Tran’s favorite thing to cook (and eat) is pho, a Vietnamese noodle soup that

has become popular in the United States.

“It’s what I ate growing up,” Ms. Nho explained. “It’s very common in Vietnam — it’s actually a very popular breakfast food there,” she said, noting that it can be eaten any time. Pho is a complex dish rich in flavor, herbs, an abundance of fresh vegetables, and special garnishes, and thus takes hours to prepare. Despite its popularity, its intricacy discourages people from making it home. “It’s healthy and the flavor is complex. It’s a healing kind of food. It makes you feel good,” Ms. Tran said.

### My favorite

What really stands out to me about Ms. Tran’s cooking is how fresh everything is. The veggies are crisp, the rice is fluffy and

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tender, and the flavors are stunningly pure. Believe me, what the café lacks in atmosphere is made up for in taste. On a recent visit, I enjoyed lemongrass and basil stir-fry (cabbage, carrot, basil, homemade sauce) served with rice and perfectly prepared tofu (crisp on the outside and creamy on the inside). Our table shared spring rolls (tofu and shrimp — again remarkably fresh) and egg rolls, and I made sure to sample my son's pho ga. He and I agree with Ms. Tran — the soup is enchanting, especially during the cold months of winter.

### Why you should plan a visit to Nho's Café

Ms. Tran's menu has something for everyone. Do you enjoy classic Asian cuisine? You'll adore the pad Thai or the spicy curry noodles. Are you an adventurous eater seeking spice? Ms. Tran makes her own spice medley that she believes is spicier than most. "I've seen people sweating and crying as they eat. And they love it! I add a lot a lot of flavor to make it special," she grinned. Do you pursue originality? Try the mushroom or

asparagus fried rice. There are lots of reasons to try Nho's.

### The details

You can learn more about Nho's Café on Facebook ([facebook.com/nhoscafe](https://facebook.com/nhoscafe)) where Ms. Tran frequently posts photos and specials. Watch for Valentine's Day specials this month. Also, the café's website ([nhoscafe.com](https://nhoscafe.com)) features the full menu as well as information about catering and Ms. Tran's private chef services. Ms. Tran's personal website ([nhotran.com](https://nhotran.com)) includes recipes. Nho's Café is located at 3801 Rockingham Road, Davenport, and is open to pick-up or eat-in Mondays-Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Fridays-Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

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Each month in The Gold Standard, Leslie Klipsch, a freelance writer and editor based in Davenport, shines a spotlight on the gems of the Quad-Cities area — for Gold Book readers. She enjoys reading, cooking, spending time with her husband and three young children and exploring all that the Quad-Cities has to offer. Read more of Leslie at [leslieklipsch.com](https://leslieklipsch.com).



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