

Fubatea grows with help of Business One-Stop Shop

■ **By Luis Rios**
El Paso Inc. reporter

With high-quality tea leaves imported from Taiwan mixed with chewy tapioca pearls – and no instant powders – El Pasoan Ileana Cabada believes her boba tea stands out from the competition.

Cabada is the owner of Fubatea, a family owned business that opened at 2106 N. Zaragoza in 2023 and a Westside location last month.

“Our main phrase is ‘brewing the future, deep in tradition,’ meaning we are conserving all the techniques from Asian culture by bringing these teas from Taiwan,” she said. “In addition to that, we are brewing the future because we are mixing it with boba pearls and fruits.”

Cabada said it took two years of planning and overcoming many hurdles to open Fubatea. One of the biggest challenges was getting the many permits required to renovate the Far East location.

Assistance from the city’s Business One-Stop Shop, she said, was crucial to navigating the process and not going over her \$300,000 budget.

“Our location on Zaragoza needed big exterior fixes, and we ended up deep in filing a lot of permits and it’s a very long process,” Cabada said. “The One-Stop Shop helped us so much to guide us through, which made us realize we didn’t need so many permits. They helped us save money and the time to process all those permits.”

She said her tea shop has seen success, and in early March, Fubatea opened a second location at 2900 N. Mesa, where there used to be a sneaker store.

The Business One-Stop Shop, a nonprofit also known as BOSS, is run by the city’s Economic and International Development Department to support and empower local small businesses.

BOSS has a network of more than 25 entrepreneurial support organizations to provide business owners with resources, including the El Paso Chamber, Better Business Bureau and the Pioneers 21 business incubator.

Mirella Tamayo, assistant director of the city’s economic development department, said BOSS can help entrepreneurs establish a business plan or process payroll for employees.

“Many businesses fail, and a lot of it is because there’s just a lack of knowledge of how to run your establishment,” she said. “By providing all the possible support, we believe that’s going to give a greater likelihood of success, generating profits and growing business.”

Tamayo said they have plans to open a BOSS location near El Paso International Airport, a renovated office space that used to belong to Destination El Paso.

No further details have been made public, but Tamayo said they received a \$500,000 appropriation from U.S. Rep. Veronica



Photos by Ruben R. Ramirez

Justin Chang and Ileana Cabada



Escobar, D-El Paso, to improve the space.

Tamayo said the BOSS concept was developed during the pandemic. In 2021, the department was selected by the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society program to participate in a lab to help grow wealth in Latino-majority cities.

During that time, the department developed the BOSS initiative to establish an entrepreneur-based support system for struggling businesses.

“When the shutdown from the pandemic happened, there were so many businesses trying to navigate for resources,” Tamayo said. “They did look to the city for some direction.”

The city used COVID aid funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to create BOSS, including a website. They also received a \$25,000 donation from Wells Fargo.

The website has seen more than 2,550 visits since it was launched, Tamayo said.

“The website is a clearinghouse of information for businesses to navigate,” she said. “It’s not just the resources but the guidance on whether they could open a business or not.”

El Paso has more than 13,500 small businesses with 20 or fewer employees and about 78,000 sole

proprietorships that do not have any employees.

Tamayo said they want to reach all of them, and the department has four economic development liaisons who go out every day to meet with business owners. They have visited more than 700 businesses so far, and their goal is to visit at least 10 businesses every day.

Among the programs the liaisons share with business owners is Buy El Paso, a rewards program designed to increase customer loyalty.

Fubatea is a registered business in the program, which Cabada said would not be the case if BOSS had not shown her how to apply. It has helped attract a regular, loyal customer base.

Cabada got the idea of opening a boba tea shop on a trip to Taiwan in 2016 as an international student with the University of Texas at El Paso.

Taiwan was also where she met her husband, Justin Chang, who helps to source the tea leaves from Taiwan.

“The interesting thing about this culture here is that it makes great connections while people are learning more about good teas,” Chang said. “We’re very happy with our locations right now, and we’re always bringing in more



Cabada’s brother Arnoldo Cabada making their signature Fubatea.

customers.”

Cabada said they hope Fubatea continues to grow in the El Paso community and beyond.

“It has been incredible to have a spot of Asian culture here in El Paso,” Cabada said, sharing a recommendation to try their signature black Fubatea. “The tea is from a secret recipe that we learned in Taiwan. We mix and brew different types of black tea leaves with creamer and brown sugar to enhance the flavor.”

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