

Photos by [Tom LaVenture](#)



Chef Yuko, placing a dinner for a waitress to bring to a guest.



Koshiki Yonemura and staff of Tanpopo pause for a moment from their busy supper rush for a photo.



The new Tanpopo dining room is spacious, yet very comfortable with its dark stained wooden floor and high ceilings. The new ArtSpace location in the Northern Warehouse in Lowertown can accommodate a quick lunch for one, and intimate dinner for two, or a large group.



Nabeyaki Udon (in large bowl) with Saba Teishoka (rice, soup, salad, pickles),

Tanpopo Noodle Shop
308 Prince Street - St. Paul (Lowertown)
651-209-6527
www.tanpopo-noodle.com

LUNCH
Mon-Fri
11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Sat-Sun
12 noon to 2:30 p.m.

DINNER
Sun-Thurs
5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Fri-Sat

5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Every neighborhood needs a noodle house

Tanpopo moves to new Lowertown location

By Tom LaVenture

Tanpopo Noodle Shop is now re-opened for business at a new location at the Northern Warehouse arts quarter, 308 Prince Street, St. Paul (southeast of the Farmers Market in Lowertown). Fans of the delicious and affordable soba/udon shop are thrilled to have their favorite lunch spot back, now with a beer/wine license and an expanded menu.

Koshiki Yonemura and her spouse Ben developed quite a following over the past three years at their former Selby Avenue location in St. Paul, until six months ago when they found the new location preferable to the leasing issue they had with their original building. After nearly three months of planning and construction, their new shop again offers guests the informal and cozy atmosphere they enjoyed.

Tanpopo is different from the many Japanese restaurants of the area, in that they don't have a sushi bar, (but do have California rolls). They specialize in soba/buckwheat and udon noodles, and

"It's larger than the old place, and we can accommodate up to 50 people," said Koshiki. "It is a little more artsy."

The new location has air conditioning, lofty ceilings with the original warehouse beams exposed. The restaurant was built from scratch and most everything is new. The owners like the new place very much, and say their old customers (with the exception of a few who lived in walking distance from the Selby location) also seem to prefer the new location.

"We're keeping the same menu and the same prices," said Koshiki, noting new additions and a rotating desert menu is new as well.

Koshiki said the restaurant's mission is to provide the traditional daily Japanese food, both healthy and affordable, to Minnesotans. Typically, Japanese restaurants will focus on the sushi, tempura, and other delicacies that people don't usually eat on a daily basis in Japan. She has recreated the neighborhood noodle shop that offers a menu with most items under \$10.

The menu offers several hot and cold noodle dishes (Soba or Udon). Favorites are the Tempura, Beef, Wild Mushroom, Tori (chicken), Kitsune, Nabeyaki (everything), and plain (with tofu). The cold noodle dishes include Bukkake, Tempura Bukkake, or Soba Salad with Miso Soup. A favorite is the Teishoku (home style meal of rice, miso, salad, pickles, and entre).

Many guests enjoy the Tanpopo Special of the Day, which on this day was the Tonkatsu (pork and deep fried rice on sauce), Saba (salted mackerel), Agedashi Tofu, Cold Tofu, and Vegetarian.

There is list of ten appetizers ranging from \$2.50 to \$5 that will both add variety to the meal, and satisfy the big eaters.

Two diners, Jim and Gerry of St. Paul, said "they love Tanpopo, and so do a lot of their friends." While Jim would like to see the restaurant back in the old neighborhood where he lives, Gary said he is now walking distance to the new restaurant.

"I was going to the other shop every Tuesday for a year and a half," said Jim.

"My favorite is the Udon Bowl, and I like the food quality, and it is always inexpensive," said Gerry.

Diner's Rebecca and Corbin, said they have been coming to Tanpopo from the very beginning, sometimes three times a week for lunch or dinner. It is among their favorite restaurants in the Twin Cities. They eat out a little less these days with the addition of their 11 1/2 month old daughter, Magdalena, who was also enjoying some of the dinner.

"Many of the noodle dishes remind me of the noodle houses I saw at the Japanese train stations," said Corbin. "I like all of them (the menu items)," but I usually get the shrimp tempura."

Koshiki moved to Minnesota from Japan when she was in high school. She opened Tanpopo on Selby opened in March 2000. She closed on November 16, 2002.

“We had to close down,” she said, adding that it was a very small place, and when the building was sold the new conditions encouraged her decision to move to a different location. “I like the Lowertown spot here,” she said. “We are closer to the Farmers Market and we use more of their vegetables in the summer time. There was a space available and it worked out for us, and I like the (arts) community here too.”

She wanted a bigger place that could accommodate customers' needs better, and now boasts air conditioning, seating for larger groups, a beer & wine license, improved restrooms, and more.

Koshiki said the move was a gamble, and that it was the support of her family and staff that encouraged her to go ahead with the plan. Despite a six-month duration from closing the old restaurant and opening the new one, more than half of her original staff returned (total of two full-time and 15 part time). She said this was a big factor in winning back her original customers and being able to hit the ground running with the re-opening.

“I got lots of support and encouragement from my family, and without the many good customers and staff... my husband and his parents, certainly this place could not have happened without them,” she added.

Tanpopo means ‘dandelion flower’, and was the name of her father’s coffee shop in the southern Japan town of Kumamoto, near the city of Kyushu, Koshiki’s hometown. There, she worked in her grandmother’s restaurant, now owned by an aunt and uncle, and continued to work in local Twin Cities Japanese restaurants while she earned her degree in psychology at the U of M.

The inspiration for starting a business was always with Koshiki. She loved sushi and the extravagant dinners available at local places, but she saw the need to provide an affordable Japanese restaurant, and one that offered the cozy and informal atmosphere, with the quality of the homemade soups and cold noodle sauces using traditional Japanese stock made from konbu and benito flakes (no MSG here).