



## CLIENT STORIES

### MENDOCINO COAST OFFICE

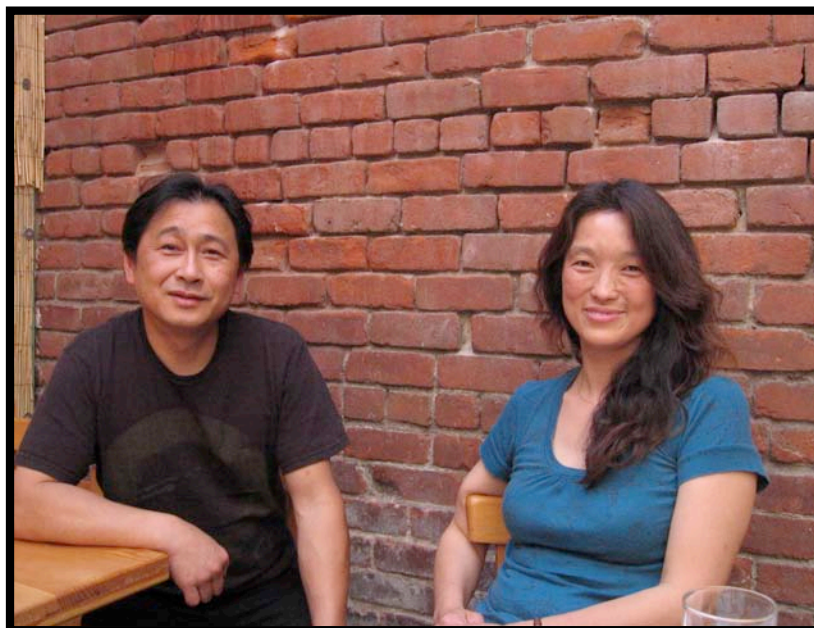
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# OCO TIME RESTAURANT

What's an OCO, and what is it doing in Mendocino County?



## OCO TIME/IT'S TIME: What is an OCO and what is it doing in Mendocino County?

To **Yoshiki** and **Naoko Sakane**, owners of **OCO TIME** and **IT'S TIME** in downtown Ukiah, the OCO is a symbol of growing up in post war Hiroshima when Hiroshima had become a center for peace education and celebration. The OCO parlors were warm, friendly places and the OCO snack was yummy and cheap. As children, Yoshiki and Naoko visited the Hiroshima Peace Park and were immersed in a peace curriculum at school.



They eventually traveled to the U.S.

landing in the Bay Area and continued to

be involved in peace activities. Yoshiki

worked for five years in a Japanese

restaurant in Berkeley before the young

family moved to Upper Lake to try out

country living. When it became clear that

a real plan for family income was needed, Yoshiki drew upon his childhood heritage of

peace education and comfort food to create OCO TIME, a peace café project that

features the Okonomiyaki, the soul food of Hiroshima. The Sakanes changed the

spelling from OKO to OCO as part of their embrace of living in California. Their first idea

was to run a simple OCO parlor with 2-3 employees. If you have been to OCO TIME,

you will know that those simple plans have evolved into something else entirely. The

café has a full sushi menu, noodle dishes, tempura and dinner platters. Wine, beer and

## West Company Client Stories – OCO TIME Restaurant

sake are served. There are 28 employees, many with health insurance benefits.

Kitchen staff is cross trained for all work stations, creating both a nimble kitchen and a career ladder. Dining staff is mentored by an established customer service professional.



The Sakanes have created not just a café, but a place to be and the community has taken notice. Many customers return again and again. During the first five years of operation, several other restaurants have opened in downtown Ukiah; yet OCO TIME continues to be full

for lunch and dinner most every day that it is open. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> year, demand for take-out sushi, hot bowls and Japanese snacks led them to create IT'S TIME which caters to the lunch and early dinner crowd. That same year, the Sakanes gathered 10 private lenders to help them buy the building on Church Street in downtown Ukiah.

What, then, are the Sakanes' hopes for the future of their business? Their answers to that question: that the customers are always happy and satisfied as much as possible; that there is abundance and security for staff; that both the employers and the employees stay humble; and that they don't all wear themselves out.

## West Company Client Stories – OCO TIME Restaurant

Yoshiki and Naoko are very clear about the many ways that West Company has helped them with their business. To begin, Naoko took the business planning course that provided the technical help to create a business plan. Equally important was that West Company trusted them enough to give them a startup loan, their first loan in the U.S. They also accessed a matched savings program. Then there were the nurturing features – things such as accompanying them to the bank to establish a credit card system; monitoring and helping to trouble shoot the first weeks of operation; getting acquainted with other start-up entrepreneurs in networking sessions. These kind of interventions helped Yoshiki and Naoko to become acquainted with the Ukiah community. Today their community extends to the far reaches of Mendocino County and they seat customers from all over the world, including Japan, in their peace café project.

*West Company/Mendocino SBDC/Women’s Business Center have offices in Fort Bragg (760B Stewart Street, 964-7571) and Ukiah (631 S. Orchard Street, 462-5931) and a web page at [www.westcompany.org](http://www.westcompany.org) .*



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