Growing appetite for supper providers

More food options, delivery among benefits for student-run food businesses

REPORT: FOO JIE YING
fjying@sph.com.sg

Quick midnight hunger fixes just became more convenient for tertiary students.

With supper options flourishing on campus — be it in the form of supper delivery services, or stalls operating into the wee hours of the morning — hostelites no longer need to leave the campus for food.

At Nanyang Technological University (NTU), hostelites rely on supper delivery services for piping hot chicken rice or char kway teow in the comfort of their rooms.

There are two such services in NTU — The Hotbox and Supperclub NTU.

The New Paper understands that The Hotbox is the more active service now. Supperclub NTU has stopped its services while it makes plans for expansion, said its owner Mr Nick Ooi, 26.

The Hotbox, launched officially in January, started with a simple gripe that Mr Ng Hoe Guan, 25, a final year student at NTU, shared with his three undergraduate friends Daniel Chen, Shaven Teoh, and Kassler Peh, who are also all 25.

Mr Ng felt there was a lack of convenient supper options for hostelites like him.

The gripe quickly developed into a business idea, and The Hotbox was born.

The Hotbox offers different food items daily from Monday to Thursday, like Boon Tong Kee chicken rice and Boon Lay Power nasi lemak.

Orders are taken via the delivery service’s website.

While business was slow initially, Mr Ng said he is seeing a rise in the number of orders.

Mr Ng said: “In the first week of our trial run in December, there were only three orders in the whole week, which was demoralising.”

Now, Mr Ng said, business has “picked up”. They get 50 to 70 orders each night, he said.

About $500 was spent to buy the website address, and one of the partners designed the website. They use their own vehicles to deliver the food orders.

“Such projects are excellent opportunities for experiential learning for our students.”

— Master of Essoff Hall, associate professor Tan Tin Wee

Students living on the National University of Singapore’s (NUS) campus at Kent Ridge are also spoilt for choice, with a new wave of supper options on-site in the form of student-run stalls.

In Essoff Hall, a hall of residence at NUS, two student-run outfits, Souper and Essoffungry, take turns to operate from the dining hall from 10.30pm to 1.30am. The former is open on Mondays and Tuesdays, and the latter, on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Souper, as the name suggests, serves soups alongside mains like pancakes and meatballs.

Launched on Jan 14, Souper is run by two undergraduates, Miss Teh Bei Xi, and Miss Kok Yue Ilong, both 23.

Essoffungry, the brainchild of four NUS undergraduates, is still in its soft launch phase and sells western fare like mashed potato, sausages, and roti.

Mr Kenny Huang, one of the four bosses of Essoffungry, said that it has built a 400-strong customer base since its soft launch in October last year.

“The initial hype and exceedingly large crowds were surprising and unexpected and sales have now stabilised and been more regular,” said Mr Huang.

Supper club

Originally a supper spot mainly for undergraduates living in Essoff Hall, Essoffungry now sees customers from other halls, he added.

NTU hostelites said they welcome this trend of campus supper providers, as late night supper haunts are now within reach of those who drive.

The nearest coffee shop is a good 15-minute drive away.

“I think there were similar supper delivery services in school but they eventually folded. Let’s hope (The Hotbox) is here to stay,” said Mr Leonard Tan, 24, an NTU undergraduate who lives on campus.

At the NUS campus, hostelites The New Paper spoke to said that even though there are eateries along Clementi Road that are within walking distance, they appreciated the convenience of having food right at their doorsteps.

The Master of Essoff Hall, associate professor Tan Tin Wee, said the businesses are required to adhere strictly to guidelines set by the NUS Office of Safety, Health and Environment when it comes to personal and food hygiene during preparation.

“Such projects are excellent opportunities for experiential learning for our students, which help them gain valuable insights on how to manage a business and at the same time, cultivate their critical thinking and problem-solving skills,” he added.