



# Respect Works Here

## Community Champion

The cards, photos and awards on the walls of the Rice Box restaurant are a testament to the deep community commitment of owner **On Ouchs**. To name just a few, there is a large cheque identifying the significant total raised at this year's Wokathon; a certificate identifies On as a finalist for the 2016 Community Leader award from the Vernon Chamber of Commerce; and many thank you cards and letters from kids and the community. It is easy to see that On gives back to his community. The busy stream of customers coming in and being greeted by their first name speaks to the success of the restaurant.

Sitting down with On and having a conversation about what motivates him and how he got to where he is today, you quickly learn that this driven entrepreneur is focused on goals far beyond his own success. You come to appreciate how one young refugee is making such a big difference in both his home-town of Vernon and his homeland of Cambodia.

On started life in a refugee camp on the Thai border after his parents had fled Cambodia. When he was five, he and his older brother were working, selling fruit to help support the family so that his father could take English lessons.

"We had heard these myths that if you have skills it is easy to get sponsored by other countries," explains On. "My parents grew up as farmers. These were not the skills that countries were looking for. We were rejected by every country. Then Canada through the help of a Cambodian support group found us and said this is a hard-working family. We were sponsored by the Anglican Church, they funded the whole project and really helped us out."

Almost seven years old when he arrived in Vernon with his parents and three siblings, On still remembers clearly what it was like. "With a bag of rice, and a box of clothes we came to Canada," he says. "It was November and cold, and we were dressed in shorts and t-shirts. We came not knowing where we were going."

After high school On started his studies to become a teacher and began working at the Rice Box.

"After I visited Cambodia, it really changed my life around," says On. "I realized how lucky I am to be here. Seeing my family there and how poor they were."

He came back with a new focus: to give back to his community. He saw an

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opportunity with the Rice Box to grow the business and bought it when he was only 25.

"Having that restaurant allows me to give back to the community," continues On. "The restaurant was a foundation for me and now I am starting a new business, Social Lead Marketing and Web Development which will allow me to do even more."

"I am pretty driven to reach my success, not to be at the top but to be where I want to be and to be able to help out where I want to help out."

