

meet your RENTON NEIGHBOR



MEET Duc Tran >

 **OPPORTUNITY SEEKER**

 **CHAIRMAN & CEO, VIET-WAH**

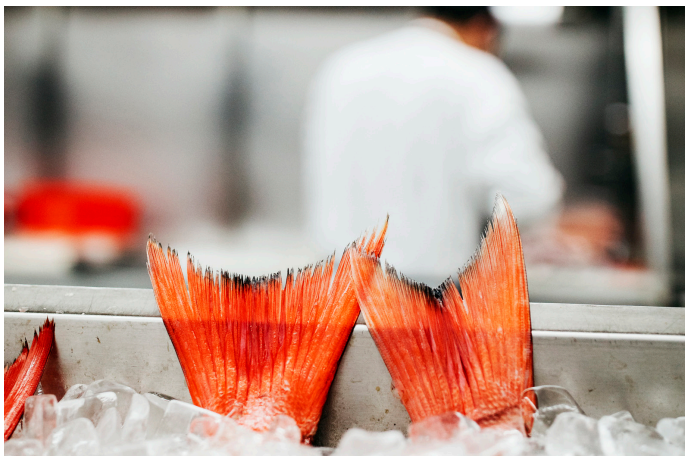
 **YEARS IN RENTON: 14**

When opportunity knocks, Duc Tran responds. Keen instincts and hard work in 40+ years helped Duc go from refugee to successful business owner.

Now chairman and CEO of Viet-Wah Group, Duc first worked at his parents' grocery store in Vietnam.

In 1976 he came to Seattle for better opportunities. He learned English and worked as a translator and counselor for the

▼ *Fresh seafood, specialty snacks and hard-to-find produce have made Viet-Wah Asian Food Market a favorite stop in the Renton Highlands since 2006.*



▲ *Locals know they'll find the specialty items they need at Viet-Wah Asian Food Market, owned by Leeching Tran and her father, Duc Tran.*

Washington Association of Churches, helping refugees who arrived at Sea-Tac Airport find housing and jobs.

Through that program Duc realized people missed food from home. Acting on the opportunity, in 1981 he opened a 700-square-foot grocery store in Seattle's International District.

"It was the first store there with Vietnamese and Thai products. We were busy right away," Duc said.

Viet-Wah Asian Food Market grew into larger spaces and opened a second Seattle location.

Leaning on his business instincts again, Duc saw potential in the Renton Highlands neighborhood. He noted the population growth as people discovered reasonable prices in Renton's new housing developments.

Duc opened Viet-Wah's location in Renton in 2006. He also operated the Tea Palace restaurant and event center in the same area for a time.

"It was good timing when the grocery store's lease was up—the building across the street was available and I grabbed it," Duc said.

Most of Viet-Wah's customers are local. They

come for the store's specialty products and the reasonable prices on vegetables, seafood and meat. Duc said he expects the store's annual growth of 10-15% to continue next year.

To continue to improve the store, Duc wants to hear from customers—especially the complaints.

“We want customers to be satisfied. Then they continue to support us, and we can continue to give back to the community,” he said.

Over the years, Viet-Wah has supported more than a dozen community organizations.

Mayor Armondo Pavone honored Duc for his community involvement, declaring April 6,

We want customers to be satisfied. Then they continue to support us, and we can continue to give back to the community.”

✓ *Customer feedback influences the products and services available at Viet-Wah Asian Food Market.*



^ *Duc Tran is involved in his stores and the community. In recognition, Renton's mayor declared April 6, 2020, as Duc Tran Day.*

2020, as Duc Tran Day. The declaration also recognized Asian Americans as Renton's Ambassadors, for making the community stronger and more vibrant.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Duc provided free lunches to health care workers and first responders. He also donated masks and kept the grocery store open.

“As a grocery, we haven't been affected by COVID too much,” Duc said. “Everybody needs to eat.”

Viet-Wah also operates a wholesale business, importing products from Thailand, Vietnam, The Philippines, China and other Pacific Rim countries.

The opportunity to succeed is out there, Duc said. “I came here as a refugee, worked hard and now I'm comfortable for retirement.”

Duc, 67, is transitioning the business to his daughter, currently the company's vice president. He admits retirement will be difficult because he's still active and enjoys the business.

After nearly 40 years as a business owner, Duc has straightforward advice for entrepreneurs.

“Understand your customers. Find out what they're looking for, then provide it,” he said. ❖