

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIM Patient Opens Small Business

SOPA: food to comfort your soul. Although literally translated as “soup” Christopher chose the name SOPA for its personal nostalgia, reminding him of foods he grew up with, cuisine he loves, and flavors he wants to share with his customers. A lot of things about Christopher are impressive: his size for one, he’s over six feet tall and his hair brushes the ceiling of his food truck, even as he keeps his posture dipped to compensate. His work-ethic, balancing a family with four children, school, and two jobs; and his goals, which he’s steadily seeing through as he navigates finding stability for his family and creating a better life for his children. When I sit down to chat with him it’s clear that he’s excited and proud of what’s taken him nearly two decades to create.

Christopher moved to Bend 17 years ago with his wife and one-year old son. He had already begun thinking about a business plan and what he needed to do to keep himself motivated and to become educated in cuisine. As a native Spanish-speaker, his first step was enrolling in English classes. But after his second child was born he had to step away from his education to work and care for his family. After a while, when his work and family life felt more secure, he once again began taking English classes, obtained his GED, and then enrolled in the Cascade Culinary Institute at COCC.

Christopher has been cooking all his life, it was when he was six and his mom was off at work, that he learned to cook his first dish: a fried egg. It was his dream to become a chef and he was putting every ounce of energy and time into making that a reality. But family became his core focus when his third child was born, and he again put his studies on hold. Between his education, work, and family, he would often get up at 5:30am and work late into the evening to fit it all in. It took him over three years to finish his classes, and two years ago he officially became a chef.

He didn’t expect to be able to get his food truck up and running. He now has a family of four, he and his wife work to pay the bills to make ends meet. But he had come this far through so many obstacles, so he pushed forward. He got a loan and began the final steps that would lead to opening his business. He had his eye on a food cart in Washington and as the price of the cart steadily lowered, he jumped in to make the purchase. Ecstatic at his new buy, he took the

whole day to drive home...because the food truck only goes 35mph. But as the truck pattered along his enthusiasm remained strong.

By September he found available space at a food cart yard, and after his food was reviewed by the owners, he was accepted to the space. With only a month to do maintenance on the truck, paint it, get power, prep his foods, and get his permits, he was able to open on September 30, 2019. Christopher is still growing his business and working full time as a chef at another local restaurant. His restaurant job doesn't offer insurance, and he cannot afford it as a new small business owner, so he relies on VIM for his healthcare needs. A typical day for Christopher includes working from 8:30am to 11:00pm, his time split between the two jobs. He feels hopeful that his business will grow and provide for his family. He started it because he wanted to do something for himself, and he feels that as an immigrant, if he works hard, he can earn a successful and happy future.

About Volunteers in Medicine Clinic of the Cascades

Volunteers in Medicine Clinic of the Cascades (VIM) is a nonprofit clinic in Bend that provides free medical care to low-income, uninsured adults from working families in Central Oregon. Our mission is "to improve the health and wellness of the medically uninsured or critically underserved through the engagement of professionals, community partners, and dedicated volunteers." VIM is the only clinic in Central Oregon that cares for the uninsured without charge. Patients receive primary and specialty medical care, medications, mental health care, surgery, physical therapy, lab work, medical tests, and education programs. All care is provided through medical and support volunteers. www.vim-cascades.org