



**CELEBRATING
20 YEARS
IN CANADA!**

20TH
WOK BOX
ANNIVERSARY

WOK BOX SHARES 20 YEARS OF GREAT FOOD AND MEMORIES!

20 years ago, many of us were flipping our Motorola Razrs and connecting with new friends on My Space. Where were you back then?

If you can remember that far back, 2004 was a pivotal year for technology. The Nintendo DS and the Apple iPod Mini hit the market, Google launched Gmail in beta form and World of Warcraft was released for gamers. But it was also a time when a big shift was happening in the food industry. Palates were evolving and fast-food

burgers and fries were no longer considered the only way to eat in a hurry.

While quick-service Asian cuisine wasn't entirely new, the idea that you could order your noodles and have them stir-fried right before your eyes in only minutes, was. And it was that idea that spawned a now Canadian household name for fast, healthy, and delicious meals inspired by **over 10 Asian countries**. No one else was doing anything like it.



**100%
CANADIAN
OWNED**



**CHEERS TO
TWO DECADES
OF GROWTH,
RESILIENCE,
AND DARN
GOOD FOOD!**

WHAT IF WE
COULD EAT
ASIAN FOOD
OUT OF BOXES,
JUST LIKE IN
THE MOVIES?



60+
Franchises
and growing

THE START OF SOMETHING SPECIAL.

When 52.5 million people watched the final episode of Friends and a dozen eggs cost only \$1.49, Wok Box co-founder Blair Stevens was opening the first Wok Box in his hometown of Edmonton, AB, Canada. And it quite literally, took off.

In June of 2004, Wok Box opened its doors on Jasper Avenue with a small, but mighty menu. Customers could choose between 8 or 9 rice and noodle boxes with distinct Asian flavours, pick a protein like chicken or tofu, and watch it come together in a flaming wok in less than 5 minutes. The customer experience was easy, streamlined, and quite honestly, pretty neat to watch.

It didn't take long for the concept to catch on quickly in Edmonton. The fusion of flavours from countries like Mongolia, China, Thailand and India, were enticing and delicious, and the flagship store was struggling to keep up with the traffic. Blair, along with new partner Scott Bender and Box Concepts Food Group, knew they had a winner in their hands and in less than a year, franchising began on the next phase of Wok Box.

For almost a decade, Wok Boxes were opening in almost every small community across Canada. The unique concept was getting a lot of attention, and everyone wanted one close to home.

Not without its ups and downs though. Wok Box grew almost too fast, and a few mistakes were made along the way; ones they prepared to learn from and leverage. Scott and Blair had moved on to other projects years before. Spaces were getting too big and rental costs were high. Franchisees were naïve, and therefore unprepared to run their stores effectively. In order to secure the success of the brand, Wok Box's head office needed to take a step back and review what they were doing.

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**BY THE SECOND WEEK,
WE HAD LINEUPS
DOWN THE BLOCK!**

**- BLAIR STEVENS,
CO-FOUNDER**

”

A TIME FOR REFLECTION AND CHANGE.

Several strategic decisions had to be made at the head office level: Executive changes were made with Scott Bender returning to the helm with Blair Stevens support, a strong operational team was built at the head office level, and a realignment was implemented within the operations to help raise the overall brand standards.

Through these changes, the Wok Box menu was also evolving, including creating Kettle & Foods Kitchen where Wok Box could create and distribute their own naturally sourced sauces. The goal was always to create efficient processes while maintaining a high level of fresh, quality ingredients. New dishes were developed with that in mind, and soon, quick fried sides like potstickers and spring rolls they called "sidekicks" were also available that could cook at the same time as the stir-fry's. This gave customers new fusion small bites that added to their meal, with no extra time to wait. Next came creative poutines with

an Asian twist and wings and tenders with over 25 sauces and seasonings. Wok Box's menu was getting more fun, creative, and exactly what the fast casual market was looking for.

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THE CHANGE WAS INEVITABLE. AND IT WAS PIVOTAL! THINGS TOOK A TURN FOR THE BETTER AND WE STARTED TO GROW AGAIN.

**- BLAIR STEVENS,
CO-FOUNDER**

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UNDERCOVER BOSS CANADA

In 2013, Blair went incognito on the Food Network's Undercover Boss to reconnect with the brand and learn from the staff. The knowledge and insight he acquired at the store level was paramount to the future success of the brand. And in the process, was able to change some lives at the same time.



BEFORE



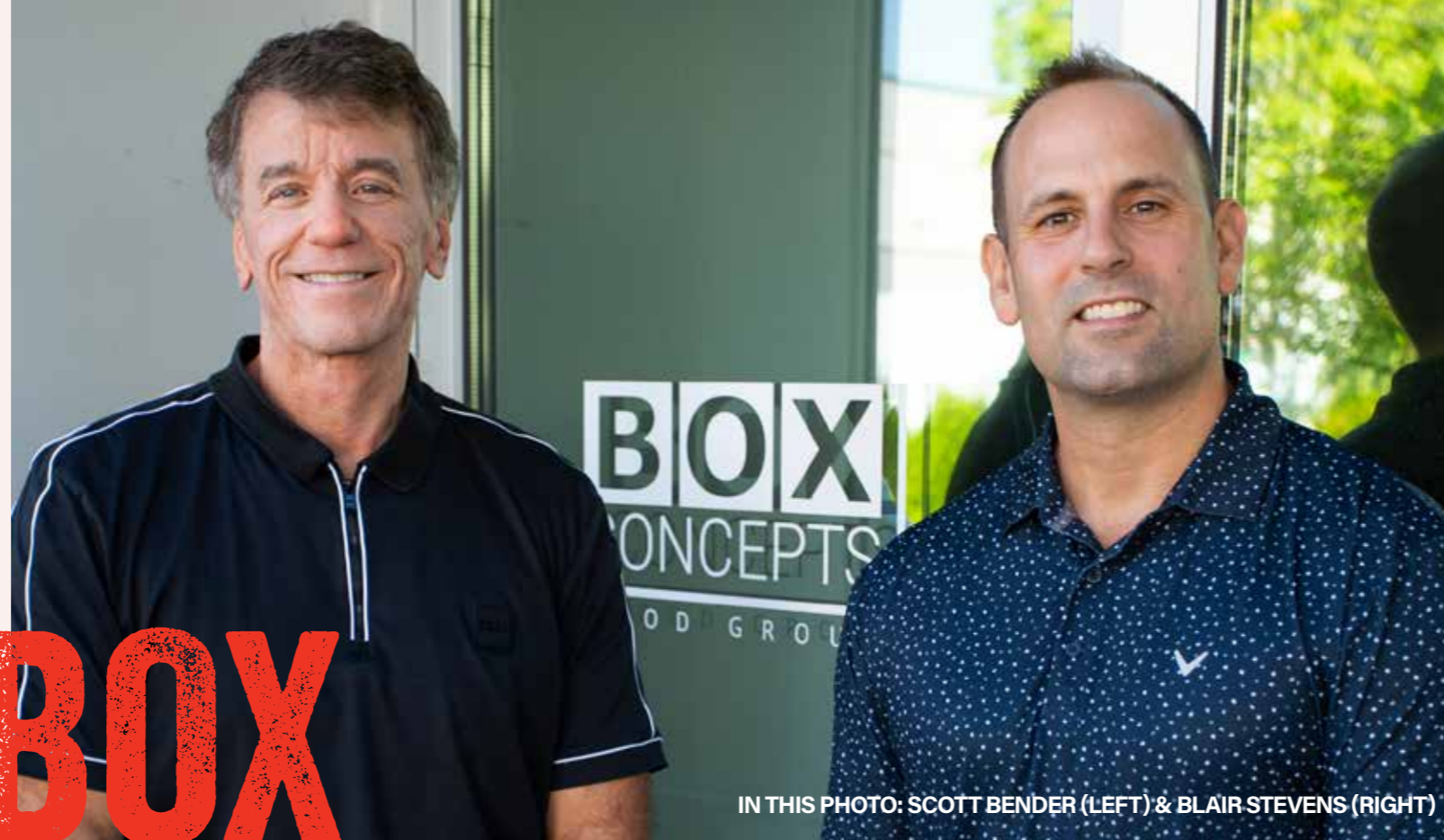
AFTER



NETWORK

WOK BOX

THE NEXT WOK BOX BEGINNING.



IN THIS PHOTO: SCOTT BENDER (LEFT) & BLAIR STEVENS (RIGHT)

him, Scott led the charge to create programs that would keep the Wok Box franchisees in business and profitable when many other chains were closing their doors. Third party delivery took off because it was the only way to enjoy your favourite restaurants, and under Scott's leadership, Wok Box also created a virtual grocery store for their customers. Think noodles, fresh veg and delicious sauces: You could get that at Wok Box locations, delivered to your front door. At a time when grocery store shelves were almost empty, Wok Box gave consumers an alternative option that no one else was.

with a concept as unique as Wok Box, it was how they got there that made the difference.

Quick-service dining was affordable and becoming more adventurous by this time. Families were choosing the convenience of fast casual chains with more sophistication than burgers, and Wok Box was offering something fresh and delicious at the same price point as fast-food restaurants. By mid 2019, Wok Box then started to leverage third-party delivery services and just in the nick of time.

When Covid restrictions hit in early 2020, the restaurant industry took a massive hit. Wok Box was already ahead of the pack.

With years of restaurant and franchise experience behind

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WE WANTED A SOLUTION FOR EVERYONE: KEEP OUR FRANCHISEES IN BUSINESS WHILE OFFERING OUR CUSTOMERS OPTIONS TO STILL HAVE THEIR WOK BOX AT HOME.

- SCOTT BENDER, CEO

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IN THIS PHOTO: BLAIR STEVENS (LEFT) & SCOTT BENDER (RIGHT)



millions
of boxes sold
EVERY YEAR

WOK BOX TODAY

Now, with over 60 locations across Canada, Wok Box is celebrating the last 20 years by showcasing 10 countries that their dishes are inspired from. With new dishes like Beef Adobo from the Philippines and Cheese Coins from Korea, to old favourites like their Beef & Broccoli inspired by Mongolia flavours and savoury Butter Chicken from India, Wok Box is reminding us of what made them special all those years ago: **combining flavours from over 10 Asian countries. And it's what they do best.**

Edmonton, AB. From that first store to spanning all across Canada, Wok Box continues to have something for everyone. Whether it's providing vegan, vegetarian or gluten-friendly options or offering traditional Asian dishes with a contemporary twist, Wok Box infuses every meal with great flavour AND the highest quality ingredients. At Wok Box, it really is more fun in a box. And as their saying goes, come in for the food and stay for the experience.

Wok Box is still growing! For franchising opportunities, visit www.wokbox.ca/franchising or email franchising@wokbox.ca

20 years is certainly a milestone, yet it feels like almost yesterday Wok Box fired up their Wok's for the first time on Jasper Ave in

By: Carmen Vogel

TALK ABOUT INNOVATIVE!

Through some of the wildest and frankly, hardest years for the whole planet, this small Canadian chain managed to do the exact opposite of what most restaurants did: they grew. **Quite literally.** There were zero location closures and many new store openings when restrictions began lifting.

New and old franchisees were seeing higher than average weekly sales, and the Wok Box brand was becoming one of the most popular choices for take-out and delivery. Staying ahead of the curve just happened to be Wok Box's superpower.



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