

Making Customers Friends



Feng Chou started a tradition of having a holiday mural painted on the window of her Parcel Plus center created by a customer who is a professional artist.



Arriving from Taiwan in 1991, Feng Chou, owner of Parcel Plus in west Houston, knows firsthand about being far from home and the comfort a friendly smile or a kind word can bring. That's why in addition to packing, shipping and copying services, Feng is quick to offer a listening ear and occasionally even a home cooked meal. Sales are up, expenses down, and with her first Best Month Ever in July, Christmas, her favorite holiday, is shaping up to be a merry one.

"I love Christmas the best," said Feng. "It is the warmest of the holidays; people are smiling and friendly." One tradition she started is having a holiday mural painted on the window of her Parcel Plus center. "A customer is a professional artist and created a mural for us a few years ago," said Feng. "Now we have one every year. All of our customers love it, and even the business neighbors come by to tell us how they like it! A few of them also have their windows painted for the holidays."

With the occasional help of Feng's two sons, ages 24 and 21, and her husband, who takes care of bookkeeping responsibilities while working a full-time job, the center broke even at the beginning of 2009. Feng wasted no time in giving back to the community. She began "First Fax of the Month," giving the proceeds of the first daily fax during the first week of the month to The Red Cross. "Sometimes they are one page and others have been ten-page documents," she said.

Feng's generous heart is extended to others in the day-to-day operations of her center. She often stops to listen to customers' personal challenges. One customer from Germany had recently lost her husband, so Feng invited her home for dinner with her own family. They remain friends today. "All her family is in

Germany," said Feng, "and she seemed so lonely after losing her husband."

In one day, two customers, in two separate visits, began crying while talking to Feng about their difficulties. Another customer who had overheard both incidences while making copies in another area of the store approached Feng, hardly believing what he had witnessed. "It is rewarding to comfort people when they need it," she said of the unusual incident.

One of Feng's biggest challenges in starting a business after coming to the United States was understanding the many traditions that Americans keep. Being in the pack and ship business helped her learn more about them. "I didn't get St. Patrick's Day or Passover," she said. "And I was surprised to learn that Valentine's Day is not just for lovers. People send gifts on that day – even to parents."

As Feng celebrates turning the corner in business and having her Best Month Ever, she focuses on giving customers a good experience when shipping their packages. And if they happen to receive more than they bargained for when they stop by, then that's fine with her. "It feels good to help others feel better," she said. ♦