

## Okasaneko Chronicles



## Soul Food

8 Sep 2011



A day before I left for Singapore, a friend recommended I drop by **Professor Brawn Cafe** in Novena Square. She had just read about it in a Singapore daily and she knew that it would get my attention. Once I found out all I could about this cafe, I knew I had to find time to squeeze in a visit, no matter how short.

As diehard foodies, my husband and I are always on the lookout for new places to visit. We love food and over the years, we have learned to expand our palates beyond McDs and KFCs. But food wasn't all we had in mind when we visited Professor Brawn Cafe. We wanted to see a profitable **social enterprise** in action, one that has received not only empathy for its cause but has earned respect for its business savvy, quality service, and good food.

Professor Brawn Cafe started as a dream for parents of an autistic young man named **Jun-Yi**. **Mr. Roland Tay** was a senior vice-president of ST Telemedia (if the name sounds familiar, it is because the Singaporean information-communications company owns 40% of SkyCable, the largest cable TV provider in the country) when he gave up his job to bet on this dream. With his wife, **Denise Phua**, they invested their own money and built the business from the ground up, pouring in countless hours and tireless effort. In October 2009, they opened Professor Brawn Cafe. Jun-Yi's drawing of a self-created superhero, Professor Brawn, adorns the main wall of the cafe.



This husband-and-wife team are no strangers to the Singapore autism community, however. Ms. Phua is one of Singapore's leading autism advocates. She is a co-founder of the **Pathlight school**, a special school that integrates mainstream education with life readiness skills. Moreover, as an esteemed **Member of Parliament**, she has devoted her service to improving the lives of people with disabilities.

The leap from successful businesswoman to autism advocate to MP may have seemed perfectly natural for this devoted mother; for her husband, however, whose lifelong work was the successful provision for the needs of their family and whose life revolved around multi-million dollar deals and boardroom negotiations, his was a leap of faith. Together, husband



and wife took this precious leap, all for the love of one child. It is a love that has spawned a love for other individuals with the same circumstances as their own.

Professor Brawn, the young son's superhero cartoon, is said to be "smart, kind and strong." Professor Brawn Cafe, the father's brainchild, seems to be all that- a combination of smart business planning, a kind, nonjudgmental attitude, and a strong desire to make a difference in society. By providing training and employment to people with autism, Professor Brawn Cafe sets the tone for businesses with a social consciousness.



Thanks for this photo, Auden!

Professor Brawn is a wonderful, quirky, and upbeat place in the second floor of Velocity Mall in Novena Square. It is a short walk from the Novena MRT station. They serve full meals (see [menu](#))- hearty soups and salads, yummy entrees, scrumptious main courses, delectable cakes and ice cream- and while the prices may seem a bit expensive for ordinary Filipino folks, the happy service and delicious food are definitely worth it.

The cafe currently has a total of 21 hired staff, ten of whom are special needs individuals. My husband and I, with our friend Auden, dropped by for late night dessert and enjoyed the cool ambience and friendly service. I easily gobbled three scoops of their rum-raisin New Zealand premium ice cream and it was divine!

On the way down, I saw **Kitty Palace**, also on the second floor, a store that sells Hello Kitty items. Across Thompson Road, a short walk from Novena Square, is the famous **Wee Nam Kee** of chicken rice fame. If you plan to visit the area, make sure you drop by Professor Brawn Cafe and show your support for this wonderful place.

I don't think I'll ever forget Professor Brawn Cafe. As a parent of a young man with severe autism, I am touched and inspired by the soul and heart behind this enterprise. More than just a restaurant, to me, it is a place a where dreams are made.

**WELCOME TO PROFESSOR BRAWN CAFE**

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### THE PROFESSOR BRAWN STORY

Professor Brawn is a superhero character who is 'smart, kind and strong'. Created by a child with a learning disability, he became the catalyst to start a social enterprise based on the values of quality, dignity and inclusiveness.

The founders are parents and friends who want to make a difference to the special needs community and others who need a leg up in society. Their dream is to provide opportunities for jobs, showcase of special talents and to raise awareness and contributions by supporters of the cause.

Professor Brawn Cafe is the team's first foray into the Food and Beverage business. Our mission is to provide affordable good food by an inclusive quality workforce comprising people of different abilities, ages and socio-economic background.

Professor Brawn Cafe started operations on 13th October 2009.

Your support and input are welcome to help achieve the mission.

Professor Brawn Cafe  
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