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Building up a big business

By ESTHER CHANDRAN

FOOD is something that John William Xavier is familiar with. Not only does he love to eat, but he also loves to cook. Hence, it is not surprising that almost everything he does daily is in relation to food.

"Tasting and sampling food is something that has become part and parcel of my life.

"It is part of my job to check out what hotels and restaurants have to offer so that as caterers we can improve in our style, presentation and service.

"It is an occupational hazard, that is why I'm so big," quipped Xavier, the manager of Big Caterers, a catering company based in Cheras.

The company has been in existence for the past eight years and is entirely family based.

"My dad has been a caterer for the past 20 years, so I guess it was only natural for me to follow in his footsteps," he said.

The only son in a family of four, Xavier's involvement in the food business began when he was just 13 years old.

He used to get paid RM5 working as a waiter at functions.

After completing his A-Levels, Xavier wanted so much to study hotel management but circumstances prevented him from doing so.

"I tried my hand as a door-to-door salesman and also as a real estate agent.

"It wasn't until I was 28 years old that my father decided to set up the catering business. It was a good opportunity for me as by this time I had gotten a taste of business and was yearning to make it as a businessman," said Xavier.

He said that the period most hectic for caterers were during weekends.

"Sometimes, work can start as early as 2am because we have to get breakfast ready for clients, and continue the day through for lunch, tea and dinner," he said.

Since much of his time is spent managing the outfit and liaising with clients, Xavier has little time these days to help out in the cooking.

With cooks from India and Malaysia, the responsibility of training and guiding them to pre-



Xavier... 'giving quality service is important'

pare meals is left to his mother Rossari Xavier who lends her expertise in aid of the family business.

"My mother's contribution to the business has been invaluable," he said.

To complement the food business, Big Canopy Rentals was set up in 1992.

"We offer tables, chairs, lightings, skirtings, air-conditioning and the works that are required for weddings and parties.

"This way, we do not have to rely on other suppliers to set up tents and canopies as we are self-sufficient.

As for the type of food

offered, Big Caterers has a range of delicacies which is Indian based but Malaysian in concept.

"Delivering the best to our customers is a principle that we abide by.

"Maintaining high standards in the quality of food and being consistent and giving quality service is important," he said.

Xavier added that marketing is something that he need not worry about as there were times when he had to reject customers due to overdemand.

"Most of the time, we get orders from regular clients and at times there is only so much that we can handle," said the 36-

year-old Xavier. With the current economic scenario, he added that there had been a 20-25% drop in business compared to last year.

"People are more careful these days. I hope that the market will pick up again soon as it will certainly help those who are just starting out in business," Xavier said.

When asked why both his companies had the word "Big", he quipped that that the companies were a reflection of himself. For more information, contact Xavier at (03)905-5264 or (019)332-1772.