

## SEAFOOD CONNECTION, INC. – SAN JOSE, CA



“The success of Seafood Connection is proof that acting on a good idea, remaining true to your vision and listening to your customers can create amazing results in a very short period of time. John Le’s work ethic and commitment to his company sets an incredible example for small business owners across the board. It was an absolute privilege to work with him.”

**FERNANDO R.  
ALVAREZ III**

*Vice President*

*Bay Area Development Company*

John Le was just 19 years old when he boarded a boat for the Philippines and fled his home in Vietnam. His ultimate destination was the United States and when he arrived in 1980, he spoke no English and had no job. John enrolled in community college to learn English and washed dishes to pay his bills. In 1987 he went to work as a driver for a seafood importer, then worked in the company’s warehouse, and ultimately became a sales representative. Along the way, John picked up invaluable industry experience and contacts, and leveraged both to their fullest when he opened Seafood Connection in 2001.

Seafood Connection imports specialty seafood from China, Vietnam and Thailand and distributes it to retailers and wholesalers throughout the nation. John capitalized on this unique, growing niche by talking with his customers and delivering precisely what they needed; from special cuts of fish to innovative, eye-catching packaging. Sales increased by 100% in its first two years of business and Seafood Connection quickly outgrew its 12,000 square foot building. John initially considered leasing space but was advised that, through SBA, he could purchase a building instead. In 2003 he worked with Fernando Alvarez of Bay Area Development Company and Michelle Babbage of Comerica Bank and secured 504 funding to purchase a 30,000 square foot building in south San Jose. The funds were also used to acquire and install essential refrigeration and freezer equipment, which allows the company to store an extremely large and widely varied inventory on site.

Today, Seafood Connection employs 30 people and annual sales reached \$43 million last year. John attributes his success to proactively filling market voids as well as fostering loyal relationships with customers and distributors alike. And ever mindful of his beginnings, John nurtures his employees, many of whom are immigrants themselves, to ensure they have the opportunity to build their own American dream...just as he has done.