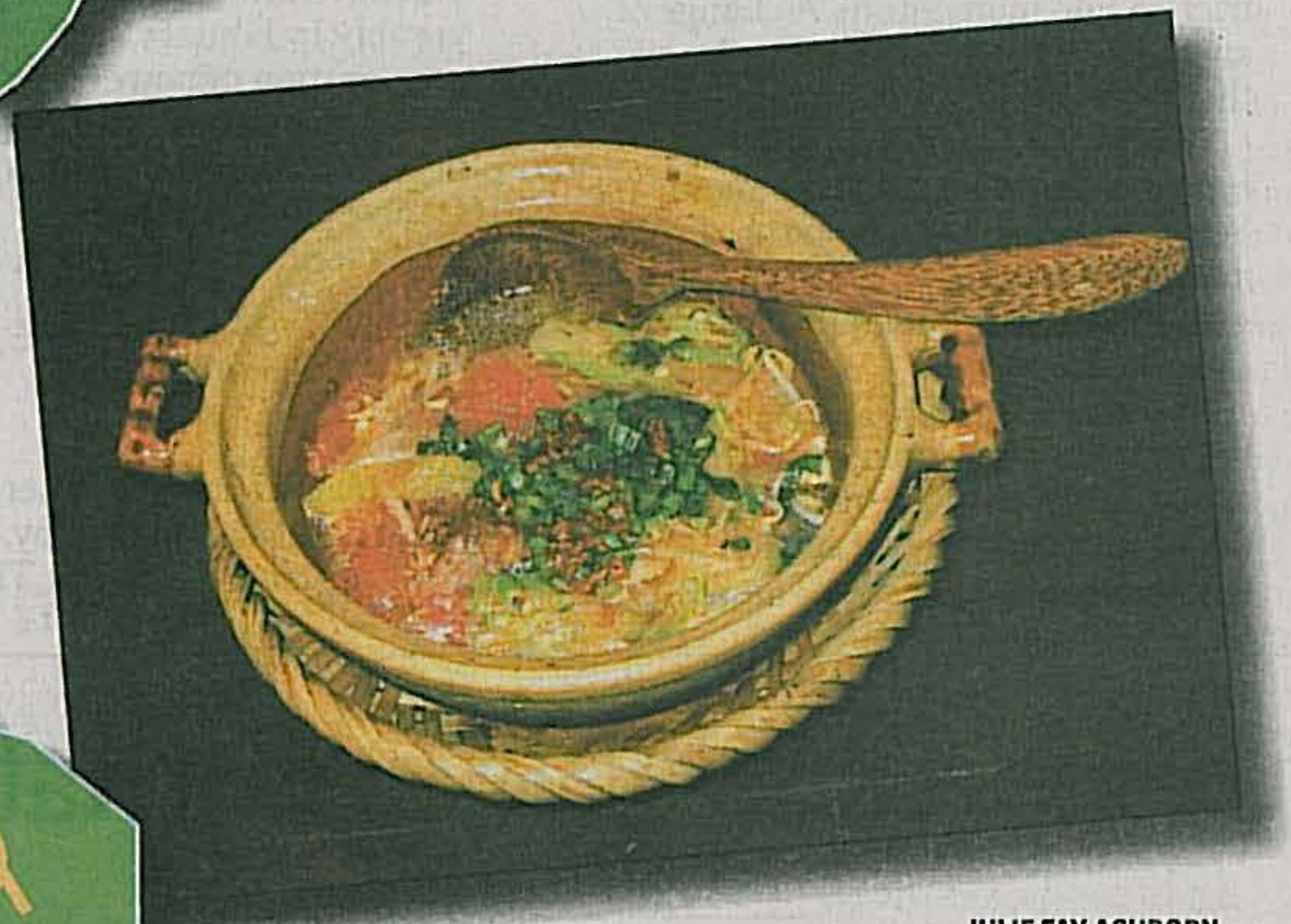


Sharing their culinary journey

After discovering food culture of Southeast Asia, Vancouver natives compile books, offer tips at a Sept. 22 reading in Portland



JULIE FAY ASHBORN
Kim's Caramelized Clay Pot Fish.

By **MARY ANN ALBRIGHT**
Columbian staff writer

Kim Fay learned two things by going to Vietnam to teach English: one, that teaching isn't for her; and two, that food and travel writing are.

Fay, a former Vancouver resident who now lives in Los Angeles, spent four years in Ho Chi Minh City from the mid- to late-1990s. While there, she fell in love with Vietnamese cuisine and the culture surrounding it.

"In Vietnam, it's very much an eating culture," said Fay, 44. "That's how you're welcomed, sitting down at someone's table."

Fay's new book, "Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam," explores the country through its food. The book features photography by her sister, Julie Fay Ashborn, also a former Vancouver resident who now lives in Los Angeles.

On Sept. 22, Fay and Ashborn will be at Broadway Books in Portland for a reading and slide show. They'll also share travel anecdotes, and offer spring rolls, wine and sparkling water to those who attend the event.

The love affair begins

Fay's love affair with Asian culture and food began in her early 20s during a backpacking trip through Thailand. The following year, she returned to Asia for a month, visiting Singapore, Bali and Borneo.

"I was hooked," she said.

Fay moved to Vietnam in her mid-20s to teach English. She quit after six months and started writing for local English-language magazines, one of which later became the publishing house ThingsAsian Press.

Fay put out her first book, "To Asia with Love," through ThingsAsian in 2004. The book explores food, and stores and other destinations in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

"To Asia with Love" became a series, which Fay

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JULIE FAY ASHBORN

Kim Fay based "Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam" on a 2005 trip she took with her sister, Julie Fay Ashborn, and friend Huong Nguyen.

Julie Fay Ashborn shot the photos for the book. Like her sister, Ashborn used to live in Vancouver. She attended Columbia River High School and Clark College.



KIM FAY

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■ Recipes: Chef Huong's Dalat Ragou; Kim's Caramelized Clay Pot Fish

If you go

■ **What:** Book reading and photo slide show by author Kim Fay and photographer Julie Fay Ashborn, who teamed for "Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam."

■ **When:** 7 p.m. Sept. 22.
■ **Where:** Broadway Books, 1714 N.E. Broadway, Portland.
■ **Cost:** Free.
■ **Information:** <http://www.kimfay.net>.

Journey:

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edits. So far, titles include "To Myanmar with Love," "To Vietnam with Love" and "To Japan with Love." Books about North India, Cambodia, Thailand, Nepal and Shanghai are on the horizon.

Fay's first book outside the series came out in the spring and recounts a 2005 trip she and Ashborn took through Vietnam. The sisters traveled with Fay's best Vietnamese girlfriend, Huong Nguyen, from as far north as Hanoi to as far south as Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Saigon. Stories and photos from that adventure constitute "Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam."

The trio met with restaurateurs, chefs, fishermen and farmers throughout the country to better understand Vietnam's past and present through food.

Many people think of rice as the heart of Asian food, but for Fay, Vietnamese cuisine is defined by fresh greens.

"Dishes are served with herbs and lettuces," she said. "Even fried food, you wrap it in greens. Your food tastes like it's

from the garden."

Fay, who attended Gaiser Middle School, Columbia River High School and Clark College, said she enjoyed revisiting favorite dishes during her return to Vietnam. Even more fun, she said, was trying new specialties of the cities where she traveled.

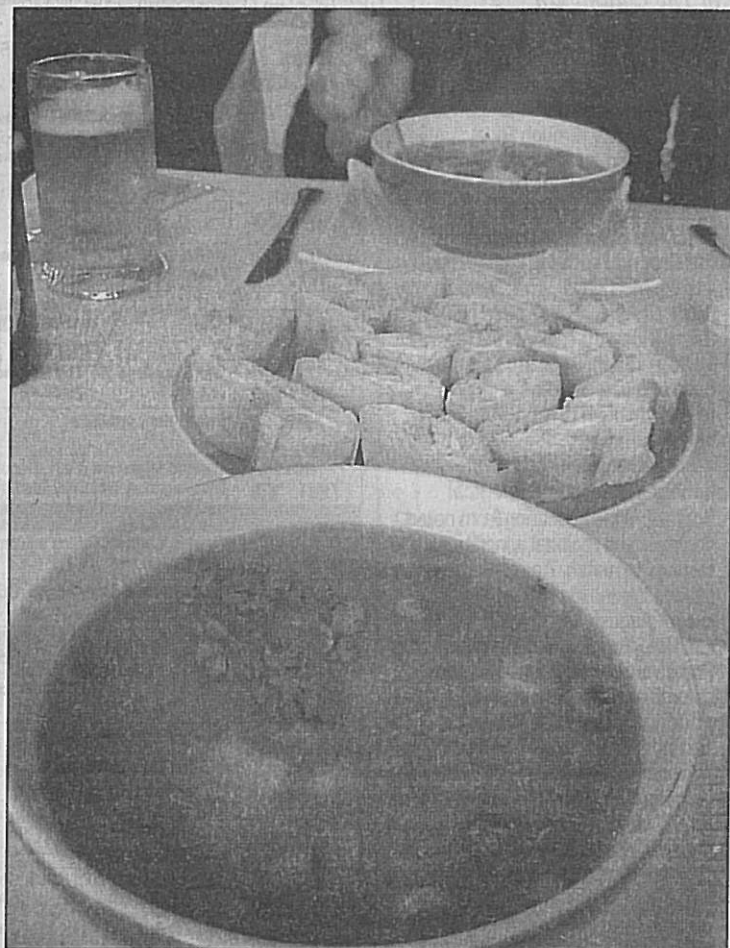
"I became obsessed with a dish I'd never heard of when I lived (in Vietnam)," Fay said. "I encountered it in the Imperial City of Huế. It's called clam rice."

The dish combines tiny clams from the Perfume River with rice, red Thai chili peppers and star fruit.

"The first time I had it, it just wowed me," she said.

Another special treat, she said, was a Vietnamese take on ragout, a French dish. Fay said she discovered this stew in Dalat, which maintains strong European influences from the French colonization of Vietnam, which lasted from the 1800s through the middle of the 20th century. Fish sauce gives the ragout a distinctly Asian flair and combines with the tomatoes to create a rich, buttery flavor, Fay said.

Fay shares 10 recipes, including the Vietnamese take on ragout, in "Communion." Here are a couple to try at home.



JULIE FAY ASHBORN

Chef Huong's Dalat Ragout is an Asian take on the French dish.