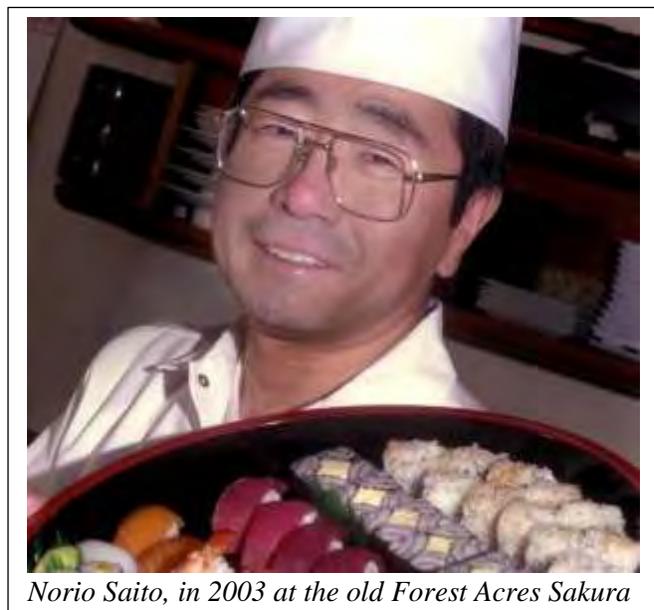


Norio Saito's Sakura Japanese Restaurant will reopen in new location

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Norio Saito, in 2003 at the old Forest Acres Sakura

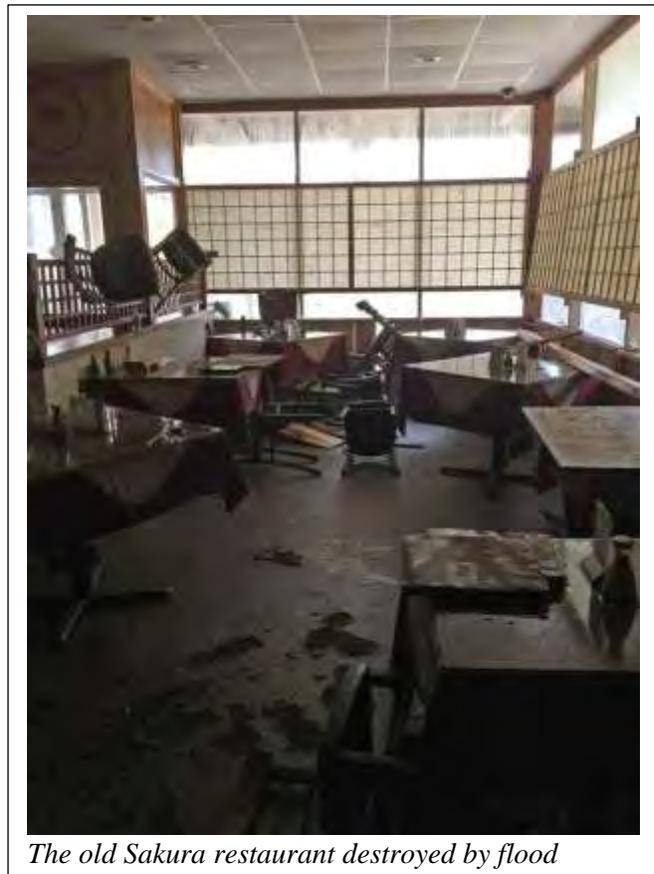
It's the news that fans of Sakura Japanese Restaurant have been waiting for – the longtime restaurant is planning to reopen.

A Facebook post and a sign on the door of Fujiya Japanese Restaurant on Rosewood Drive state that Fujiya restaurant has closed after more than a decade in that location.

In its place, the owners of Sakura will open after remodeling the space. The timetable for that reopening was not immediately available Friday.

“It was a case that the owners of Sakura were looking for a space, and I was looking to sell my restaurant,” says Bud Hwang, owner of Fujiya.

“We’re in the process of doing a deep cleaning of the space,” said Jamie Altman, spokesman for Norio Saito. The Saito family owned the beloved Forest Acres sushi restaurant, which was one of Columbia’s first sushi restaurants when it opened in 1984. The Forest Lake Shopping Center location was hit hard in the devastating floods of October 2015, and the restaurant has been closed since.



The old Sakura restaurant destroyed by flood

Sakura’s loyal fans were hopeful the place would come back. Altman, who worked at the restaurant and has been helping since it closed, started a Go Fund Me page just after the floods that raised more than \$9,000.

Norio Saito said in late 2015 it was unlikely he would reopen his 30-plus-year-old restaurant at the same Forest Lake Shopping Center location, but the prospect of moving from Forest Acres made him both sad and hopeful.

“The time has come for change,” Saito said at the time. “Everything changes.”

Altman says that remodeling plans for the new Sakura include extending the sushi bar, removing the hibachi grill and installing some new carpeting.

“The basic sushi menu should stay the same,” he said, with maybe a few new additions.

Altman has revived the [Rebuild Sakura](#) Facebook page, where he will post updates on the progress of Sakura.

Fujiya had occupied the space at 4430 Rosewood Drive, in a small shopping center between Little Caesar’s Pizza and The Little Gym, until mid-April. It had been serving there for 12 years.