

# Communiversality

*...a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)*

## Economic Justice Monitoring Project

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## **Introduction**

The Central Corridor also known as the Green Line stretching between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul crossing University of Minnesota covers 11 miles area with many businesses and residential houses. The Green Line is expected to make commuting easier to support the development of the Twin cities.

With a long stretch through busy area, the light rail construction is making a big and direct impact on people and businesses. Since the light rail construction took place in early 2012, the businesses along University Ave have encountered many difficulties. Among those businesses, small businesses experience the most impact. The impact is measured not only by how many businesses are open or close but also the revenue, the amount of customers as well as human and social impact.

The research picks Little Mekong area to study CCLRT's impacts on small businesses and the owners of those businesses. Little Mekong, a 5 block strip of University Avenue from MacKubin Street to Galtier Street in Saint Paul, Minnesota is a newly established business and cultural district. It is known as a destination for Asian cultures, authentic food and shopping. As an initiative of Asian Economic Development Association, Little Mekong mission is to develop the area at University Avenue and Western as an attractive destination for visitors and residents; to support and promote businesses during light rail construction; to share cultural traditions and activities; and to create a living, breathing, colorful district for all to enjoy.

Little Mekong includes hundreds of businesses with different services such as restaurants, financial services, health services, etc. Despite different types of services, Little Mekong's businesses share many things in common as most of them are family owned businesses. They are all small businesses run by family members, who mainly are immigrants from Southeast Asian countries. Businesses for them are a way to support families and the future of the next generation. Also, with a wide variety of ethnicities and different languages spoken, the outreach activities and getting update information about the light rail construction encounter many difficulties.

The research takes two businesses, Mai village and M.A.I Spine, as examples to conduct face to face interview with the owners about financial, human and social impacts of the CCLRT on the owners and their businesses.

By using story telling style, the research focus on portraying the images of not only these two businesses but also the images of the owners as immigrants and how they have overcome many difficulties in order to start and maintain the businesses. At the same time, the researches emphasizes the other aspects of CCLRT's impacts that might be underestimate such as human and social impact on business owners and the community.

Mai Village and M.A.I Spine are chosen for this research because of the similarity and uniqueness in the stories of immigrants as well as the difficulties that the owners suffer from the light rail construction.

Mai village is one of the biggest and most famous restaurants in the neighborhood. Having been around for more than 20 years, Mai village has never experienced any severe difficulties as the construction brings to the restaurant

M.A.I Spine is one of the rare health services in chiropractic with expensive equipments such as MRI machine, which experiences a lot of impacts coming from the light rail construction.

Both these two businesses have played an important role in shaping the neighborhood and supporting the community. Due to the construction impacts, Mai village is now facing their foreclosure and M.A.I Spine has thought about moving the location. Besides the loss of revenue, the owners and employees also experience health impact. With the businesses going down, it's also difficulty for businesses to give back and support the community.

The stories of Mai village and M.A.I Spine are not individual but many other small businesses along University Ave are experiencing similar impacts from the CCLRT project.

## **Methodology**

The research was conducted by using face to face interview with the businesses' owners. Each interview was approximately forty five minutes long. The interviews were recorded. Open questions were mainly used for the interviews.

- **Key questions:**

1. When and How did you end up moving here? (US, MN, St. Paul)
2. Why and How did you open this business?
3. How did the business change your life (Hopes and dreams for your family)
4. What have you been through? Compare those difficulties with the construction.
5. What are the impacts of LRT on your business:
  - Financial impact
  - Human impact
  - Community impact
6. How does the future look like?  
How things might change about your life and your business?
7. Is there anything else you would want to share about the impacts of the CCLRT on you and your businesses?

# Mai village – To live is to dream

Mai, the owner of Mai village came to the United States in November, 1975. First, she stayed in a refugee camp in Pennsylvania for two weeks. After that, she came to St. Paul, Minnesota where she currently resides. The reason she decided to come to Minnesota was mainly because of her father. He worked in the U.S. before. He liked Minnesota because there were many big companies such as 3M and Honeywell, which provided financial opportunities. Also, for Mai's family, Minnesotans were friendly, open-minded and lived in a culture that treated them without discrimination.

Ngoan, Mai's husband is the co-owner of Mai village. He had quite the adventure before he decided to settle down in St. Paul, Minnesota. Ngoan came to the United States on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975. His first destination was Columbus, Ohio. He stayed there for several months, failing to find a job. Then, he moved to Minong, Wisconsin to reunite with his sister. He spent fifteen months in Wisconsin working as a cow butcher. During that difficult time, he decided that he ought to pursue education in order to have a better job and a better life. That was when he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota and enrolled in a vocational institute. He learned to be a machinist and continued his studying full time while working full time as a plastic injection mold maker.

Mai and Ngoan first met in late 1976. Their stories like many other immigrants' started in ESL classes for Vietnamese. Ngoan worked as a military official in Vietnam before coming to the U.S. so he already knew a little bit of English. Mai also learned English beforehand. Ngoan followed his friends, while Mai followed her mother and sister to class in order to meet other Vietnamese. ESL classes at that time were bridges connecting immigrants to make them feel less homesick.

Ngoan and Mai became close friends. Both of them had families before they met each other. Their other significant halves were left in Vietnam with the pain and loss of the war. For them, it was chaotic time in the history, which separated their families but brought two broken hearts together. They felt the hurt of being lonely in a different country without family. They understood all difficulties and struggles. Mai and Ngoan got together to share, to support and to love each other. For them, that was destiny.

At the end of 1977 when Mai and Ngoan got married. Ngoan worked and studied full time while Mai mainly stayed at home as a housewife. They had eight kids together. That was a hard time but they managed to raise the kids and maintain a happy family.

Mai never thought of opening a restaurant. There wouldn't be Mai Village without many significant events happening in their lives. After her son's suicide at the age of 14, Mai was totally depressed. She once felt that she would never be able to stand up again. Ngoan with the hope to help Mai overcome the sorrow of loss, he encouraged her to start working. Mai started working a manufacturing job for Honeywell. She had no prior experience and tried to work and go to school at the same time. However, Mai got laid off over and over again due to her lack of experience. Her depression became a constant problem but both Mai and Ngoan never lost their hope.

One day, Ngoan said to Mai "You are a good cook. Why don't we open a restaurant?" Their first restaurant location was also on University Ave, which now is part of the International Plaza. At the time, Mai was confident in her cooking skills for her family but she didn't know how to cook in restaurant quantities. Despite not having any restaurant experience both Mai and Ngoan always stayed positive. Mai was willing to learn from other people, going to other restaurants. She had faith in herself that she could do it!

Mai Village first opened in 1990 after a few months of construction. It was the area's largest Vietnamese restaurant. For Mai, the restaurant was not a way to make money, but a new child that she gave birth to with all her dreams and hope. They didn't have a lot of money and it was difficult to find outside support. Mai had to work as a designer from brainstorming the ideas to choosing wall papers and light fixtures. After the restaurant was built and the business was running, it didn't make enough money to support itself. Mai admitted that starting the restaurant was very hard and challenging.

Mai remembered all the hardship her husband and she had to overcome and how much they worked in order to build the restaurant. Ngoan had to work hard to support not only the family but also the restaurant. Ngoan had to run back and forth between his work and the restaurant. He spent his lunch break to help Mai out. After work, he ran straight to the restaurant's kitchen. Sometimes, he was so tired that he felt asleep on the giant bag of rice in the kitchen. Both Mai and Ngoan had to work really



hard in order to open and maintain the restaurant. However, without the support of family, Mai Village would never be successful. All seven of their children and Mai's parents came to work in the restaurant without getting paid. They supported Mai and Ngoan all they could without anything in return. That was when Mai felt the strength and love of her family which helped her to overcome the difficulties in her life.

Mai Village also experienced difficulties coming from the neighborhood as one of the first restaurants in the area. One of the biggest issues when Mai first opened the restaurant was safety. Mai is still scared now when thinking of how her car was destroyed or of customers being held at gunpoint. In spite of difficulties, Mai always thinks that she was lucky to have support from the city, especially from former police Chief William Finley. Some policemen were assigned to be there in order to maintain safety for the neighborhood.

Even though there were a lot of difficulties, the more Mai got involved with restaurant activities, the more she felt proud of herself and the restaurant as a part of bringing and introducing Vietnamese culture through authentic food. Ngoan and Mai were confident that they could succeed.

Her hard work finally started paying off. Mai Village's business was really good. However, both Mai and Ngoan were never satisfied with themselves. They kept trying harder and harder. As Mai said, "the U.S. is the land of opportunities. When the chance comes, you need to take it." Adding to Mai's ideas, has been Ngoan's dream to build something that makes Vietnam's image better. He loves to make people understand more about Vietnamese culture, art and architecture. Thus, Ngoan and Mai decided to buy a new location that would celebrate Vietnam's rich culture and heritage.

The idea started in 2000. In 2002, Mai and Ngoan applied for the loan. The restaurant eventually opened in 2004. Mai recalled those times as hard but exciting moments in her life. She refers to the restaurant as the combination of her and Ngoan. She was really proud to share that all the designs were done by Ngoan and the colors were chosen by her. As a family member of the royal family in Hue, the kingdom of the last dynasty of Vietnam, Ngoan wanted to build a restaurant that has the design and architecture of palaces where he grew up. As a traditional Vietnamese woman, Mai picked really soft and lovely colors for her restaurant. Two years of construction meant many times going back and forth

between Vietnam and US. Thirteen containers were shipped from Vietnam. Even the dishes, plates, bowls, chopsticks were provided by a famous pottery company back in Vietnam. Ngoan and Mai tried their best to make sure that they could bring not only authentic food, but the real Vietnamese culture to the area.

There were many challenges and difficulties to build a new restaurant. In order to build such an elegant restaurant, Mai and Ngoan decided to bring 15 skilled construction workers and an interior designer from Vietnam to the U.S. These workers were supposed to be in charge of building the interior part of Mai Village as an example of a palace of Nguyen dynasty in Hue, Vietnam. However, it was impossible for the workers to obtain a US visa to come and work for the restaurant project. Eventually, Mai hired local workers who were not familiar with the architectural designs and ideas. That cost Mai Village more time and money to finish. Inflation increased the prices of the architectural elements such as iron, wood and bricks. It was also difficult to transition the metric measurements for Vietnamese materials to the American standard measurements to build the restaurant. Sometimes, when thinking back, Mai thinks that challenges were foretold. In the first day of building the restaurant, the rain caused flooding. The unexpected delay and damage worried Mai and Ngoan. However, they felt really lucky that they are always together. For them, the key to success is understanding, sharing and love.

When opening the restaurant in 2004, Mai and Ngoan literally had \$10 left in hand with an almost overwhelming bank debt. Mai Village is a pride of not only Mai and Ngoan but also the whole Vietnamese community in the Twin Cities. Mai Village started gaining a reputation based on the friendliness, caring and honesty with customers. The customers love the restaurant's delicious food and beautiful design. Both Mai and Ngoan could relax and enjoy that their hard work paid off. They thought that they had a strong foundation that nothing could change or destroy it.

When comparing between difficulties in the past and current Central Corridor construction activities, Mai made a joke with serious meaning that what she has been through is just an ant in comparison with the difficulties that the construction brought to her and her business, which were the size of an elephant. Mai doesn't think that it's totally the construction's fault. She considered her business is getting weak and falling during the recession. Now, when the business hasn't had enough time to stand up again, the construction happens which collapses the business.

Each month, Mai Village lost about \$20,000. Both Mai and Ngoan expressed negative feeling about the construction. For Mai Village, the \$20,000 forgivable loan from the U7 project is not enough, especially when the business is decreased about 40-50% in comparison with the last year. From May 2012 compared to May 2011, they lost \$30,000. In May 2012 compared to April 2012, they lost about \$10,000. They are also frustrated about the dirt and vibration. They stopped cleaning the windows and customers were really unhappy about the noisy and unclean environment. Moreover, Mai Village also had to deal with access issues due to the confusion of signage showing different directions and the blocking of construction trucks. Mai and Ngoan have tried to call the hotline several times, but it always takes so long for the issue to be addressed and solved.

Besides financial problems, the construction has a big impact on their health. Both Ngoan and Mai suffer from all the stress from losing sales and dealing with the hassles of construction. As a cancer survivor and having had strokes, Ngoan not only has to fight with his sickness, he also has to worry a lot about the restaurant's activities. Ngoan even said that if cancer didn't kill him, the construction would. Mai felt that she wanted to fight life threatening diseases rather than go through the process of construction again. She had several panic attacks and it was difficult to get up in the morning. Furthermore, both Mai and Ngoan can't even go back to Vietnam to visit their families. Not coming back to Vietnam also makes it difficult for Mai Village to get more products and unique decorations that Mai wanted to have in order to make the restaurant prettier. Ngoan and Mai need to be there to be the role model for employees. Everything possible to cut has been cut or reduced. Mai and Ngoan have no free time as well as no hobbies. Mai even has to give up one of her interests which includes decorating for the restaurant in four seasons. Now, the restaurant needs to stay the same all year round which is a disadvantage for the restaurant and customers but also sadness for Mai. All they need to do now is to think of how to survive.

Mai Village has been through a lot of difficulties to be one of the favorite restaurant destinations in the Twin Cities not only because of the authentic delicious food but also because of the designs and architecture. Losing Mai Village would mean losing the pride of the Vietnamese Community. A lot of customers from the Twin Cities area and many other places would be very disappointed without Mai Village. Customers who have been coming to Mai Village for 22 years since the restaurant first opened have tried their best to come frequently to support the business. Furthermore, Mai Village used to create a lot of job opportunities. Before, they had around forty employees including three host girls

wearing traditional Vietnamese clothes called Ao dai, which made Mai Village even more unique. Now, they only have 15 employees without any hosts. Each employee, including Mai and Ngoan, has to work more hours with more work. They are always overwhelmed but they can't cut anymore.

However, Mai thinks she should never give up on her child to which she has devoted time, tears, effort and love. By any means, they need to keep the business.

Ngoan and Mai have tried their best to overcome all the struggles. Their hope when deciding to spend all the money and effort in building the new Mai Village is not only for five years, ten years but at least for fifty years. They teach their kids how to cook and hope that next generations will keep the restaurant. Mai and Ngoan started having a dealer over to buy all the antiques furniture and handmade products that they have collected for many years. It has always been Ngoan's dream to open a little museum about Vietnam. Vietnam has a proud history of over 4000 years. For them when customers start loving the food, it's when they want to know more about the country. Not everyone can go to Vietnam so why not bring a part of the country to the U.S. It's the meaning of culture and also a mental life for Ngoan and Mai. That's why they have the second floor on top of Mai village. Ngoan collected traditional clothes, furniture, handmade products and pottery. When building the second floor and collecting unique items, Ngoan hoped that one day, he could open it to the public. He could explain to people Vietnam's dynasties, art, culture and history through his collection. Besides introducing the culture to Americans, Ngoan's biggest dream is to teach a younger generation about their own culture: who they are and where they are from. As a Vietnamese immigrant, Ngoan thinks it's very important for not only him to remember his mother land and culture, but for everyone else too. In twenty or thirty years, the new Vietnamese generation might not even know what Ngoan and Mai had now. That's a pain for them to let things go. For them, it's like cutting a part of their body or giving up on their own dream that they have tried so hard and even thought that they almost reached it. However, for Ngoan and Mai, in order to survive, that's what they need to do. Even in the future, they are not sure if money is enough to get those things back. "That's a heartbreak for us but a big loss for many future generations", said Ngoan.

When being asked about the future, both Ngoan and Mai feel uncertain. They have been told that the future would be bright and nice with the light rail, better transportation system and more people coming to the area. Nevertheless, they have never experienced it. All they can do is to hope that it's true as Mai

said “To live is to dream”. However, during this difficult time, they really need at least a chance to keep faith in their hope. “Going through the construction time is like going through a long dark tunnel. We will not stop walking through the tunnel but at least we need to see the little light at the end of the darkness”. The future is uncertain for Mai Village and other small businesses. They don’t know how they can stand up after the construction. They are worried about the increases of property tax. Ngoan and Mai are suffering every day, but they know that they will not give up. They still want to fight. They will fight. They have been through many difficulties. From upper middle class living luxurious life in Vietnam, they came to the U.S. as immigrants with nothing in their hands. They started everything from not having anything. They have proven that as long as they are determined and work hard, they can be successful. Now, the challenges come. Ngoan and Mai want to try their best to keep the restaurant. They want things to stay forever so their children and the next generation can be proud of what they have done today. Mai doesn’t see Mai Village as a landmark of Vietnamese community. For her, it’s simply her love and pride that she will try her best to protect and make it better. Ngoan and Mai are trying hard but they really need some help. They feel like they are walking on an unstable ground that they might fall anytime. Even when they try their best to balance, a hand reaching out will be a great help to bring them to the final destination.

Ngoan and Mai believe that if they overcome this construction challenge, they will grow back stronger than ever. They think about the future with a new face for Mai Village to match with the development of the light rail and the neighborhood. Ngoan and Mai are ready to fit with the situation and time. They already have many ideas to improve Mai Village, but still need to wait for the chance to come. Mai has thought of more types of food to put in the menu. Right now, Mai Village is an active member of Little Mekong, a newly established culture and business district along University Ave. By doing that, Ngoan and Mai hope that they can maintain the strength of Asian businesses and of the community. They believe that Mai Village will be a part of a diverse community in St. Paul. “That’s why we call it United States. We, Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, Hmong, African, White, are here to be united”, said Mai.

## **MAI Spine**

**Life is like swimming in the ocean, you need to keep swimming or you will sink.**

Not every immigrant's story is the same. Although it might be the same that all immigrants have to leave their country to a new place. And it might be the same that all immigrants have to overcome millions of difficulties from language barriers, culture shock to homesickness. Still, each individual has their own story to tell and Dr. Mai is not an exception.

Dr. Mai, the founder and owner of MAI Spine is a Vietnamese immigrant. His father was an American pilot who got killed during the Vietnam War. He came to the U.S. on March, 1985, at the age of 16. Like many other immigrants, Dr. Mai stayed in a refugee camp in Bangkok, Thailand for a month. Dr. Mai shared that it was tough to stay in a refugee camp. The food was not good and not enough. It was so congested that people literally slept right next to each other. No space. No fresh air. Nothing. However, Dr. Mai considered himself lucky when he left his country to go to the U.S. by plane not by boat like many other immigrants. At the age of 16, Dr. Mai, following an immigrant program, left his family behind to come to the U.S. by himself. His adventure started like that.

Being underage, Dr. Mai was sponsored by Rita Hopmans and Rose Hopmans, who had sponsored about three hundred kids overall. He went straight to Minnesota with a couple of other kids. He spent his time in Morehead, Minnesota, growing up and going to school there. Even as a kid, Dr. Mai always wanted to become a doctor. He just didn't know what specific field he wanted to pursue as a doctor. Then he found his real interest through a tough lesson.

It was when Dr. Mai was in Morehead senior high. He played volleyball and blew out his knee. It was

so serious that he couldn't walk for about three or four months. That was when Dr. Mai realized that he wanted to pursue his medical career in chiropractic. "I blew out my knee to know what I wanted to do in my life," joked Dr. Mai.

It took Dr. Mai almost five years to get out of high school but since he decided what he wanted to do in life, he had never stopped working towards it. He started studying Pre-med and then Med school. In order to live and pay for school, Dr. Mai opened a restaurant named Saigon Café in Morehead, Minnesota. He worked really hard while studying full time. Now, when thinking back, Dr. Mai admitted that besides the dream to become a doctor, he somewhat had a business mind. By running a restaurant when being a college student, he prepared himself for the future business as a doctor.

After graduation, Dr. Mai went to Virginia for practice with one of his partners. After seven years, Dr. Mai decided to move back to Minnesota. He felt more comfortable with the place and the people that he had known and loved for many years.

Being fluent in Vietnamese and able to speak some Cambodian and Hmong, Dr. Mai wanted to help the Asian community especially by using his language skill to overcome the language barrier. Dr. Mai decided to pick St. Paul as his clinic location due to its high density of Asians.

When his clinics first opened, Dr. Mai experienced a lot of difficulties. Dr. Mai subleased two locations from his friend, one in St. Paul and the other one in Brooklyn Park. All activities of two clinics were run by only him and his wife. Dr. Mai was the only doctor and his wife worked as a receptionist as well as a chiropractic assistant. Every day, Dr. Mai had to drive back and forth between two locations to see his patients. He still remembered driving all the way to St. Paul when a patient called and coming back to Brooklyn Park after lunch. Then, after 6pm, he had to drive back to St. Paul sometimes just to see only one patient. Dr. Mai and his wife had to drive back and forth many times in a day. By the time they got home, both of them were exhausted.

Safety issues were also one of Dr. Mai's concerns at that time. However, growing up in Vietnam and experiencing a rough life, Dr. Mai managed to overcome that difficulty. He always believed that, if he treated people nicely, nothing bad would happen to him.

Dr. Mai and his wife worked extra hard for more than a year before they could hire another doctor to

support the clinics' activities. He always tries his best to accommodate patients' needs. By understanding and making patients understand him, Dr. Mai got great support from the community. Since 2006, Dr. Mai's business grew very fast. With great service, many people came and referred their friends to Dr. Mai's clinics. Right now, Dr. Mai has five doctors, sixteen staff, four clinics and one MRI center. Dr. Mai is very proud that his business is the first Asian business that is recognized by the mainstream medical field especially in chiropractic. Dr. Mai is also satisfied when he is able to help the community by providing different language translators of more than fifteen languages. "At our clinic, for some common languages like Somali, Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, Hmong, Cambodian, Karen, Nigerian, we have more than one person who can speak those languages fluently," said Dr. Mai.

To have this success like today, nothing comes easily. Dr. Mai is proud of what his team and he have done but he is never satisfied with that. Dr. Mai said, "I think I have different philosophy from a lot of people. I believe life and business are like swimming in the ocean. You have to swim all the time. You can rest for a little bit but then swim again. If you don't swim, you will sink." Besides expanding the business to support more people in need, Dr. Mai's dream is to come back to Vietnam with the best technology to help people over there. For Dr. Mai, it's not success if we cannot give it back to the community.

He practices his philosophy from the smallest action with the community around him. The owner of the building that Dr. Mai rents is also Vietnamese. The bank was about to take over her building in three months. The building hadn't been rented for many years since the owner built it. The building cost too much to build so it was very expensive to rent. When Dr. Mai's wife knew about that, she called and talked with the owner. Then, they decided to rent the building to help her out even when they already looked at other locations. They accepted to pay a higher rent to support other Vietnamese. They even rented almost the whole building because they believed that it was one of the ways to support the whole community.

Dr. Mai has managed to overcome many difficulties and even have a chance to give it back and support the community. Now, he has royal patients. With a big team of experienced doctors and assistants, he has more time to take good care of and to talk with individual patients. For him, this is priceless. It's valuable when he knows what the patients expect and what he can do to help them as well as to support the community. At the same time, with people he can trust that will take good care of his patients, Dr. Mai has more time to go back to Vietnam and start to think about how to bring back technology and good doctors to help poor people in his home country.

However, when things seem to settle down, new challenges from the light rail construction arrive. Dr. Mai said that, "It's hard to compare the difficulties before with the challenges coming from the



construction. They have different scale but the construction affect is bigger than any hardship before.” One of the reasons that Dr. Mai thinks the construction is a big challenge is that it’s unexpected and beyond his ability to deal with.

About financial impact, Dr. Mai introduced Brenda, the manager of MAI Spine to share about how much the business has lost. Brenda showed a big worry about the construction activities’ impact on their business. Besides business going down 50%, during the summer season, since the construction made it to their side of University Ave, MAI Spine had to close four to five days due to the prevention of construction from running different machines. The MRI experienced the most difficulties. Due to the vibration, MRI could not be done easily and normally. In each day that MAI Spine had to close, about fifteen to twenty appointments were canceled which cost up to \$20,000 per day. In order to fix that problem, MAI Spine had to schedule their appointments after the construction time. Most of the scans had to be done around five to seven in the evening which caused MAI Spine to pay for overtime hours for employees. Besides, appointments also had to be scheduled during the weekend, which also cost more money to run the clinic and pay for employees. Right now, MAI Spine has to install some vibration protector paddings to absorb the impact. It is costly but MRI needs to be done before doctor sees the patients.

Besides many canceled appointments and the reduction of customers, Dr. Mai also expressed a concern about the effect of electric current on his machines: “We could try to manage during the construction but we need to know how we can survive after it.”

MAI Spine is an active member in Little Mekong. Thanks to the help of Asian Economic Development Association, the sponsor of Little Mekong, Dr. Mai and Brenda had a chance to meet with decision makers including Mayor Coleman on a Walking Tour on August 6<sup>th</sup>. After the Walking Tour, MAI Spine was set up to have an appointment with engineers from the light rail construction project. The answer for the electric current’s impact on the MRI machine operation is not clear yet but moving the location is one of the least favorable options for this business. According to Dr. Mai, the machine weighs about 35,000 lb, which costs around \$100,000 to build a new place and move. Other than finding a good location and redecorating the new place, money will be spent to build a room covered by cooper in order to protect the MRI machine.

MAI Spine has done everything it could in order to maintain the business. Besides financial impact, the human impact of the construction also plays a big part in creating difficulties for this business. For Dr. Mai, closing this location is a possible but very difficult option to do. If the clinic shuts down, many people will be laid off. Moreover, people get used to coming to this location for the scan. People in the area might not be well served if the clinic moves. The one who will be affected the most will be the underrepresented group like low income people or minority groups, who rely heavily on the language support from MAI Spine. “Of course customers can find other chiropractic medical centers that provide language interpretation but for such a wide variety like what we have available, that would be difficult. Also, it might be very expensive for a clinic to have interpreters while we already have a good resource”. Furthermore, Dr. Mai also complains that the construction makes it really confusing for his patients to come and get their treatment. With the chaos of University Ave, many people from other cities try to avoid and not to come to his clinic. Adding to some of Dr. Mai’s concerns, Brenda also mentions the stress for both employees and patients when they have to do treatment in a vibrating and dirty environment due to the construction activities. “We try to maintain a clean, quiet and peaceful atmosphere for our patients but the construction destroys it all,” said Brenda.

Last but not least, the impact on MAI Spine’s business activities leads to the impact on the whole community. If MAI Spine has to move the location, Dr. Mai thinks that nobody will rent the space. Another big space will go empty like many other locations along University Ave.

To conclude about the impact of light rail construction, Dr. Mai said, “Any construction has impact. This construction has a huge impact on business and people. It’s everyday impact. And there will be impact even after the construction. However it’s hard to say that it’s good or bad. I hope that it will be a positive impact”.

When being asked about the future of the light rail, Dr. Mai is still not clear about the benefits of this costly project. He thinks that it might benefit the people living along University Ave. However, he doesn’t think that his clinic will benefit much from the light rail especially when there is no on street parking when the light rail is finished. Many of Dr. Mai’s patients live far away so driving is a better option for them. For Dr. Mai, people who live on the light rail line might be able to take the train but people living 10-15 blocks to the south or north might find it difficult and inconvenient to use the train.

Dr. Mai's goal now is to try to survive for another year figuring out the effect of electrical current on his machines. "It's stressful with an uncertain future but I try to stay positive. We have always been here to support our patients. Now when challenges come, I hope our customers will do the same things to us," said Dr. Mai.