

Soo Hoo Insurance: Part of the Neighborhood

Local insurance agency is here to stay.

- By [Alix Roy](#)
- [Email the author](#)
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South End native Richard Soo Hoo has looked out the same window for nearly 20 years, but the view is constantly changing.

“It’s changed so much, it’s better now,” he said recently from his Washington Street office, which overlooks Peters Park.

In the past, prostitutes and drug dealers congregated regularly in the back parking lot of Soo Hoo’s insurance office and in the shadow of the since-demolished elevated train, which once connected Chinatown and Roxbury.

“It looked like a movie set,” Soo Hoo recalled. “There was a police detail, always.”

Much has changed in the neighborhood – upscale eateries including [Myer’s & Chang](#) and [Red Fez](#) have moved in and [Peters Park](#) now features a popular dog park and [outdoor artwork](#). The SoWa arts district has blossomed into a lively hub for local artists and visitors from out of town.

In the midst of it all, Soo Hoo’s tiny green storefront, labeled with Chinese characters and a paper sign taped to the window, is thriving.

The agency, which Soo Hoo opened in 1993, offers every kind of insurance imaginable to clients from all over New England. Soo Hoo and his 8-person team sell insurance on everything from automobiles to fusion protein research – and in many cases, they offer better service than national chains.

“Our response is quicker, we don’t have to go through a middleman,” said Soo Hoo, who’s been in the insurance biz for 33 years.

Soo Hoo’s agency has modernized where it counts – it has a well-designed [website](#) and active [Facebook page](#) and keeps on top of industry trends. In other ways, Richard Soo Hoo Insurance is a refreshingly old-fashioned operation.

Take, for example, Soo Hoo’s aversion to voicemail.

“We don’t have it,” he says simply. “We don’t have voicemail or mahogany.”

Soo Hoo prefers to talk to clients in person and invites any potential customers to “just drop by.” Casual visits are commonplace at the office – many long-standing clients bring their dogs along, and some arrange for their packages to be delivered to the agency while they’re away.



Richard Soo Hoo (back row, far right) and his son, Sterling (back row, second from right) with the rest of the agency in its Washington Street office. Credit [Alix Roy](#)

“Sassy thinks she owns the place,” Soo Hoo says of the office’s most notorious canine visitor.

Establishing a place in the neighborhood has been natural for Soo Hoo. He cooked pancakes from a sidewalk stand to promote his business years ago, a memory he laughs at now, and says he plans to be around for years to come. When starting his business, Soo Hoo said he chose the neighborhood for its diverse customer base. Setting up shop in Chinatown would have limited his clientele to the Asian community, he said.

“We’re like a United Nations here,” he said. “You name it we have it.”

There’s also his genuine affection for the neighborhood he grew up in – Soo Hoo spent his childhood on Upton Street before going to college in New York City. He later returned to Boston after serving in Vietnam and attended Boston University night school for four years.

“Back Bay is the East Side and we’re Greenwich Village,” he said. “We’ve got artists, we’ve got all different kinds of people. It’s so down to earth, it’s not stuffy like Newbury Street.”

There’s just one thing that irks him.

“I don’t know how they got SoWa,” he said. “They should call it Soo Hoo.”