



Made with whole milk from Ontario cows, the kefir can be topped with seasonal tropical fruits, which include dragonfruit, guava and persimmon, in addition to house-made walnut sesame clusters and quinoa cereal blends.

**T**eresa Chang used to think of kefir as that despised stuff her mom made her eat.

“We hated it,” says the 38-year-old Chang. “My mom would open the jar and my sister and I ran in the opposite direction. We were convinced it was her way of making us do homework.”

Today, however, she’s learned to love the taste and health benefits of the tangy yogurt-like fermented milk made for centuries in the Caucasus Mountains region in Eastern Europe.

She’d better. As co-owner of deKEFIR takeout and retailer in the Bay Adelaide Centre’s PATH system, kefir is Chang’s bread and butter.

Valerie Choy-Remark, 35, whose background is in food science, came up with the idea to open a spot serving healthy kefir-based grab-and-go items.

Few people knew what kefir was when Chang and Choy-Remark opened deKEFIR, a small counter and kitchen with a handful of seats in 2010. And those who did, didn’t think the less-effervescent, thicker variety the pair sold was actually kefir at all.

Some said: “You don’t look like you’re from Russia. And you

don’t look like you know what you’re talking about,” she says with a laugh.

It turned out they do. Skeptics admitted it was a taste of home. Office workers looking for a healthy breakfast or lunch amid the PATH’s fast-food outlets found an alternative.

“At the core of everything is kefir and eating food that’s alive,” Choy-Remark says.

For both women, who have been friends since they were teenagers kefir was part of their lives, growing up in Mississauga.

“Our group of Asian moms were passing along the little kefir grains,” Choy-Remark says. “It started with one of my best friend’s moms, who had kefir grains coming out of her ears. It sprouts and sprouts — and she didn’t know what to do with it. It’s the gift that keeps on giving.”

Choy-Remark says kefir was popular among her friends’ families because Asians can have a hard time digesting lactose and their traditional diets tend not to include dairy. They find it easier to tolerate probiotic-rich kefir.

Chang says when she started eating kefir, she lost weight and