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OCEANSIDE TRAIL OPENS

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Rosa Maria Jaurena Vargas hikes down the new Oceanside Trail at Cabrillo National Monument on Sunday, April 28. The trail, which opened on April 24, connects with the Coastal Walk and tidepools below. THOMAS MELVILLE/PENINSULA BEACON

SDPD to resume enforcement of Vehicle Habitation Ordinance

By DAVE SCHWAB | The Beacon

The see-saw battle over whether, when, and where people can live legally in their vehicles continues.

The City's Vehicle Habitation Ordinance forbids people from sleeping in their cars from 9 p.m.

to 6 a.m., as well as excluding them from parking within 500 feet of a home or school.

Enforcement of the City's VHO was paused during the pandemic, partly due to a legal challenge brought on behalf of vehicle dwellers. Some coastal residents have complained ever since about the

non-enforcement of the VHO, in effect since 2019.

San Diego City Council recently approved a nearly \$3.2 million settlement in a federal lawsuit case, Michael Bloom, et al. v. City of San Diego, which challenged the existing VHO. The settlement set new rules for how the City is allowed

to enforce its Vehicle Habitation and Oversized Vehicle ordinances against unhoused people who sleep in their vehicles or RVs during a three-year period.

The settlement also allows San Diego police to resume full

SEE VHO, Page 4

CALIFORNIA WILD ALES

MAY THE 4TH BE WITH YOU
JOIN US AT OUR OB TASTING ROOM FOR SPECIAL STAR WARS BEERS AND EVENTS ALL MAY 4TH



City Tacos celebrates 10 years as a palate-expanding taqueria

By DREW SITTON | The Beacon

Much has changed in the San Diego culinary scene since Gerry Torres opened City Tacos in North Park 10 years ago. Some of that change is thanks to his work educating the public about what authentic Mexican food should taste like through his affordable gourmet tacos.

Torres and executive chef Eduardo Baeza are both from Mexico City. A decade ago, Torres felt like Mexican cuisine in San Diego consisted of the same menu at every taco shop with the same five ingredients in each dish plated in 25 different ways. In 2014, he opened an authentic taqueria with flavorful offerings foreign to San Diego palates.

The original menu had five tacos: Borrego (lamb), Chile Relleno, Chorizo, Pollo City, and Portobello. Customers vote on new tacos every month, building an ever-evolving menu with some favorites that have never been voted off.

“You do have to educate your client base. You do have to make them think outside of the norm,” Torres said of his time helping the public embrace his philosophy of tacos.

He believes tacos must always be eaten fresh at a taqueria, remembering his time in Mexico where tacos were made to order one at a time so none went cold. It was

only during the demands of the pandemic that City Tacos grudgingly began offering takeout and delivery.

Consistency is maintained throughout all locations thanks to his commissary kitchen. Making everything from tortillas to sauces from scratch and handling delivery to the shops also keeps costs down while guaranteeing quality ingredients.

“You can’t mask food. It will find a way of shining through whether it’s good or bad,” Torres said. “It’s about quality.”

The growth of City Tacos has been careful and methodical. The eatery has never been in debt and all locations are solvent. When finding a new location, Torres walks the neighborhood to see if it is a place he would enjoy visiting. This has led him to La Mesa, Ocean Beach, Encinitas, Petco Park, Pacific Beach, Sorrento Valley, and Los Angeles. His next steps are to open a northern commissary kitchen and another location in Los Angeles with eventual plans to make it to San Francisco.

Through the growth of the business, Torres’ wife of over 20 years Cristina Benavente is the unsung hero of City Tacos. He describes her as an excellent, experimental cook whose culinary endeavors are often the inspiration for tacos of the month.

“She is a foodie just like me... and she likes to excite my palate

by doing creative things,” Torres said.

She also took on extra child-care duties in the early years of City Tacos. Now, Torres limits himself to eight-hour days and takes one day off per week. His two adult children returned from northern California and Florida respectively, of their own volition, to help with the family business.

“It brings tremendous joy because the family has enjoyed the ride along with me. We are a very close-knit family,” Torres said.

His son Hector Aguirre is a regional manager and his daughter started the company’s Instagram account in addition to being a shift manager.

“They made me hip, or tried to make me hip. The kids have been instrumental in moving the process along,” he said.

His youngest son, now 13 years old, may not be old enough to officially work for City Tacos but is



Gerry Torres at the Ocean Beach location of City Tacos where its anniversary celebration will take place on Saturday, May 4. PHOTO BY ALT STRATEGIES

still an inspiration for City Tacos’ most ambitious endeavor, the taco playground in Ocean Beach. Torres found his teenage son glued to his computer and had trouble relating.

“We wanted to be out and about and enjoying life. The OB Playground is about that. It’s about, turning off the devices, socializing with your kids, playing with them,” Torres said. The

CITY TACOS

Where: 4896 Voltaire St.
Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. daily.
Info: citytacossd.com.

open-air location is decorated with murals made by local elementary students and filled with giant games like Jenga and checkers.

“I’ve seen that flourish. I haven’t seen any tablets or phones within the space, which nowadays, that’s pretty much [impossible],” he said.

OB Playground at 4896 Voltaire St. will be the location of the biggest anniversary celebration as well on Saturday, May 4. The restaurant is opening early at 10 a.m. with a mariachi band at noon and circus performers at 1 p.m. In honor of the mascot Pepe the Pug, anyone who brings a pug between 10 a.m. and noon will receive a free taco. Later in the day at 4:15 p.m., the circus heads to the Pacific Beach location for another performance.

There are also several specials going on that weekend, including two tacos and one Mexican beer for \$10. The Taco of the Month will be Borrego, one of the five original tacos on the menu in 2014. The whole month, there is a flight special of three tacos for \$13 when choosing from the five original tacos Borrego, Chile Relleno, Chorizo, Pollo City, and Portobello. More details at <https://citytacossd.com/>.

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