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10 years of tacos

City Tacos burst into North Park in 2014 with daring Mexican flavors that have reshaped San Diego's culinary scene. (Photo courtesy Alt Strategies)

By DREW SITTON

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. He left La Mesa Italian restaurant Tiramisu Trattoria to open 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

SEE CITY TACOS, Page 11

Amendment to Hillcrest community plan heads to Planning Commission

By DREW SITTON

PlanHillcrest is nearly finished after years of work and public feedback. The Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment heads to the Planning Commission May 30 then the full City Council this summer after public comments closed on April 29. Detailed

improvements to protect legacy LGBTQ+ businesses, pedestrians and cyclists, speed up transit, reduce vehicular commutes and add up to 17,000 housing units are now all included in the amendment to the Uptown Community Plan adopted in 2016.

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The last town hall about PlanHillcrest was held at the LGBT Community Center before public comments closed at the end of April. (Photo by Drew Sitton)

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City Tacos

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Portobello. Customers vote on new tacos every month, building an ever-evolving menu with some favorites that have never been voted off. One original that remains popular, the portobello taco, was introduced at a time when vegetarian food often consisted of a pile of lettuce with no presentation or flavor, according to Torres.

"I was here for a couple years and I think that also helps with the success of the restaurant because 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 at the University Avenue location.

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 take-out and delivery. He succumbed to public demand again when adding a traditional taco menu of birria, carne asada, pollo asado and carnitas which still eschew flavorless toppings like iceberg lettuce. Still, he finds customers are still more willing now to try the unfamiliar.

While Torres wanted to provide an authentic taqueria experience, he never wanted the flavors limited — which is not to say Mexican food is limited. With French, Spanish, Arab, and US colonization influencing indigenous foods, it is one of the most complex cuisines in the world with a huge variety across states.

"It's part of our history. It's part of the flavors and flavor profiles we've enjoyed over the years," Torres said. "Food has always been evolving."

Torres originally wanted to name the taqueria The World in a Tortilla but rejected the monicker as too wordy. While the name did not stick, it could still be a motto of the business as global flavors and influences are an important aspect of the daring toppings inside his tacos.

"It was always about doing something different than what was out there," he said. Toppings being limited to onion, cilantro and tomato would have been easier than the 20 ingredients on the line staff must learn, but would not taste as good.

He settled on City Tacos as it is easy to remember yet still cosmopolitan. When growing up in Mexico City, Torres' parents worked as pilots and would bring home snacks from around the world. His palate was shaped by marzipan from Lübeck, gulas (baby eels) from Spain, cheese from Holland. His partner Baeza is French-trained, a background evident in many of the restaurant's sauces. Torres' travels continue to shape the menu. His recent trip in Asia might result in a Vietnamese-themed taco or



Circus performers, a pug meet-up and a flight special are all part of City Tacos' anniversary celebration. (Photos courtesy Alt Strategies)

Wagyu taco — depending on customer votes.

"We are not necessarily looking to continue tradition; we're looking to set tradition," he said.

His efforts to challenge customers to eat outside their comfort zones has caught on with City Tacos so successful it now has eight locations. To celebrate the anniversary, circus performers will be at the North Park location from 1:45 to 2:30 p.m. on May 3.

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 citytacossd.com.



Gerry Torres was at the North Park eatery daily for the first few years City Tacos was open to ensure its success.

East Village

CONTINUED FROM Page 7

vanilla-based products from the verdant fields of Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Dadora's mission extends beyond producing quality farm-to-table natural vanilla and is fueled by a desire to uplift local communities throughout the world, with an emphasis on empowering women. At the store you can find an assortment of Vanilla Tahitensis bean products that you can mix into your baked goods, beverages, sauces, desserts and more, making it the perfect gift for mom!

Delightful pastimes

The East Village neighborhood is chock-full of fun activities that you and your mom can enjoy together. First stop is Tavern + Bowl, a local favorite for tasty bites, an upbeat atmosphere and some friendly competition. Beyond enjoying the shareable appetizers and delicious bar foods, you and your family can head to the bowling alley and test your skills to see who will take home the title of best bowler.

It's wine-o'clock somewhere! Specializing in wines from smaller estates and unique locales, Boutique Vino is a hidden gem in East Village. As you walk in, you are instantly immersed in the cozy atmosphere and friendly energy of the local wine bar. Along with being a tasting bar, Boutique Vino also hosts wine classes where participants can delve deeper into the rich history of a variety of wines.

Culinary offerings

East Village's rich culinary scene makes it easy to find the ideal restaurant for a Mother's

Day meal. Cowboy Star Restaurant and Butcher Shop is the first restaurant in East Village to serve up a unique neighborhood fine dining experience by fusing contemporary American cuisine with a western twist. Committed to supporting neighborhood farmers, fishers and producers, Cowboy Star's menu boasts a fine selection of fresh meats and seafood paired with locally grown, natural and organic ingredients.

Importing the authentic flavors of the Isaan region of Northeastern Thailand to San Diego, Sovereign Modern Thai takes a unique approach on traditional Thai food unlike any other in the area. Sovereign serves up only the freshest of ingredients, often including locally harvested rockfish and tuna, depending on availability and the time of year. The chefs prepare everything from scratch, and from the heart, in order to serve delicious dishes that taste as delightful as a home cooked hearty meal.

East Village also boasts an array of perfect spots to savor a delightful Mother's Day brunch with your loved ones! Indulge in morning delights at eateries like Casa Octavio and Lola 55, where menus showcase everything from breakfast classics to beloved Mexican favorites.

Mother's Day is a cherished occasion for many and is the perfect excuse to spoil the women who mean so much. Make this Mother's Day one that she'll never forget in East Village!

For the latest updates on East Village Association, please visit us at eastvillagesandiego.com and follow us on Instagram @EastVillageSD, TikTok @EastVillageSD and Twitter @EastVillageSD.



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