

The Huntsville Times

Fresh ingredients equal gourmet Mexican food

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Special Sections

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Read the small letters beneath the name of the restaurant Cantina Laredo. They call this gourmet Mexican food.

"So," you might ask, "what is gourmet Mexican?"

Obviously, it's no secret. Pose the question to a manager, and the answer may come in recipe-speak.

The verde sauce is made fresh every morning from tomatillos, jalapenos, poblanos and onions. Salsa Laredo is roasted tomato, jalapeno spices, vinegar and onions. No one seems worried about spilling the beans. A tomatillo salsa on every table gets its smoky flavor from blackened red peppers.

Cantina Laredo is one more gem in the crown of Bridge Street Town Centre. Across from P.F. Chang's Chinese Bistro, it stands sentry at the entrance to this chic shopping and entertainment complex at the corner of Research Park Boulevard and Madison Pike.

This is like no other Mexican restaurant in town. The chile relleno is decorated with red ranchero and green tomatillo sauces; its meat stuffing is a picadillo mix of ground beef and pork, almonds, raisins, cinnamon and nutmeg. Its sweet flavor can be a shock.

No visit to Cantina Laredo is complete without the experience of top-shelf guacamole, an \$8.99 appetizer created tableside by a server. A bowl of avocados decorates each table as a reminder.

Enchiladas de Espinaca are stuffed with sauted spinach, jack cheese and mushrooms and topped with a sour cream pepper sauce. They are a great \$10.49 entree - not really light, but not too heavy. Enchiladas Veracruz are similar but with chicken, and lunch portions cost \$8.99 or \$11.99 at dinner.

Seafood lovers might enjoy the shrimp poblano chimichanga, a wrapped tortilla stuffed with shrimp, peppers and cheese, for \$13.49. The camaron poblano asada is like Mexican surf and turf - a plump poblano pepper stuffed with shrimp and cheeses, all wrapped in an outside skirt steak. It costs \$20.49.

Desserts are a delicacy, especially the Mexican apple pie or brownie with brandy butter and ice cream for \$5.49 each. Both are brought sizzling to the table.

Cantina Laredo is a showplace for Mexican food. The presentations are artful, and the tastes are daring - whether spicy hot or saucy sweet. It is fast becoming a favorite for many of Huntsville's most discerning tastes.