

NEW BUSINESS | CANTINA LAREDO

A MEXICAN EXPERIENCE THE OWNERS OF CANTINA LAREDO AIM TO PRESENT A SUPERIOR EXPERIENCE IN MEXICAN DINING

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BY YVONNE CAREY

An extensive, separate tequila menu, guacamole made table-side and attentive staff are signatures of the finest dining in Mexico City. Now that tradition is taking root in Broward, ready to spoil the Taco Bell out of South Floridians and alter their attitudes about Mexican food.

"Our food is great. But our service is better," says Freddy Magaña, director of operations for Cantina Laredo, a new gourmet Mexican restaurant in Plantation that he said has been described as "the PF Chang's of Mexican food" by The Fort Myers News-Press.

And although in some places that statement would signify a lack of culinary mastery, in this case, said Magaña, it just raises the bar on other restaurants' service.

"If we see you walk in wearing black pants or a black dress, we promptly use special linens that won't leave lint on you," he said.

"If you order guacamole, we bring the avocado to your table, scoop it out and prepare the guacamole right in front of your eyes, so you know it is absolutely fresh."

Cantina, which offers traditional Mexico City recipes for chiles rellenos -- smoked peppers stuffed with cheese or steak, and seasoned -- also serves up a creamy, woodsy mole (pronounced mo-lay) sauce, the famous sauce made from dried chiles, unsweetened chocolate, blanched almonds and anise.

The Plantation location is only the second in the state for the small chain.

Franchise owner Len Lemmer said the goal for the authentic Mexican restaurant was not to bring in the Tex-Mex feel, but the opposite -- to leave Texas out completely.

"People here in South Florida haven't even tried the best Mexico has to offer. And part of the excellence in Mexican dining is the service. It's an experience," he said.

Cantina's menu also carries tacos al Pastor, succulent rib-eye, enchiladas Veracruzenas, and a tequila menu with 50 different types of special tequila ordinarily found in the United States.

"Margaritas are made with fresh-squeezed lime juice. That is the only way," Magaña said.