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Authentic Mexican taqueria comes to Rheem

By Vera Kochan



La Chamba Taqueria's cheerful interior Photo Vera Kochan

The new La Chamba Taqueria, located at 484 Center Street in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center of Moraga, doesn't just bill itself as "authentic Mexican cuisine" without backing up the claim. All of the recipes were handed down to owner Ben Rojas from his Mexican-born mom.

□ Rojas, his wife Kelly and kids Sam (11) and Lily (9), moved to Moraga in 2018 from San Francisco. He had a dream of opening "a no fuss place for people to get a good meal." And, recalling the laid-back taquerias in Mexico, "I wanted to bring this type of food to Moraga using authentic recipes that came from my family. I'm big on food and wine, and I wanted to try something that would connect me to my culture."

□ As a young woman, Rojas' mother had every intention of becoming a nun in the Catholic church. The order she belonged to expected their novices to develop a skill that would be useful within their convent. She was put through a culinary program just before she was to

take her vows, and while on a contemplative break, decided to leave the order and get married. Sadly, both of Rojas' parents died in their 30s, but her creative recipes are lovingly kept by his brother in a large folder.

□ Rojas, in real estate by trade, admits to being a good cook, but leaves those duties to his restaurant staff. His son wants to work at La Chamba as soon as he's legally allowed. "You should never work in the restaurant business unless you want to provide something special for the community," he stated. "And it's important for the community to support local business."

□ The restaurant's name, "La Chamba," is slang for "the job" or "work," but Rojas explained that when you find a job and the experience becomes good, it becomes your passion. "It's your gig. It's what you do. That's your jam."

□ Their website states: "We want our customers to feel like they are part of our family when they dine with us. That's why we've created a warm and inviting atmosphere that is perfect for family dinners, date nights and everything in between."

□ La Chamba's décor includes bright white and soft blue walls, chrome countertops, and red chairs that complement the 1930/40s-era antique taqueria tables from Mexico. Customers can watch the finishing touches being applied to their orders through the glass preparation counter. "It's kind of like dinner theatre," joked Rojas, before proudly stating, "Everything [the salsas, guacamole, handmade tortillas, etc.] is made fresh in the morning."

□ The eatery's No. 1 seller is the carne asada, with Baja fish and pollo asado coming in second and third respectively. Also on the menu are tacos, burritos, nachos, flautas, ensaladas, quesadillas and birria Jalisco-style (a meat stew). They've already had positive feedback that their food tastes like authentic taqueria fare. Mexican sodas, draft beer, and wine by the glass are also available. Shrimp has recently been added to the menu, and there are vegetarian options with no added animal fats.

□ La Chamba Taqueria is open Monday through Saturday from noon to 8 p.m. Closed on Sundays. They also cater. For more information visit their website: LaChambraTaqueria.com or call (925) 592-0964.

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