

## DINING

## Salsa's serves healthy Mexican dishes

BY ELKANOR & RAY HEALD  
Special Writers

Open for nearly a year, Salsa's Gourmet Mexican has been discovered at lunch by Chrysler Tech Center employees who are delighted with the price, variety and healthy traditional Mexican fare. They fill the 40-seat dining space at tables of two or four or tables pulled together for larger groups.

In the evening, there's a steady take-out business. Neighborhood people, such as Tony Huff, stop for a quick Mexican dinner.

"This is the closest to authentic Mexican for the money," he said. "I judge Mexican food on tacos and they're excellent here. The rice and refried beans are the best. I love Mexican food and come here several times a week."

Norman Sheldon was pleased that his take-out order of Whole Lotta Enchiladas and Mexican corn dogs was ready in five minutes. Weekend families are enthused with the healthy choices and the kids menu.

Friends since childhood Mike English, Steve Shaver, Dave and Bob Kopka of West Bloomfield are business partners. English, who has many years' experience in the Muer Corp. and at Beverly Hills Grill, is full-time managing partner. His partners, otherwise employed as full-time professionals, work evenings and weekends in the kitchen and at the service counter.

Mexican food was the choice for the group's first entrepreneurial venture because "Mexican is hot," Shaver said. "Fast food marketing research indicates Mexican as a food trend right up there with Italian. We chose this location because we're close to the Tech Center, in the middle of a large residential area and near businesses on Opdyke Road."

About the time Salsa's was opening, the health news was giving Mexican food a bad rap. "All the focus was on how unhealthy Mexican food was," English said. "But we already had healthy as our mission. We don't cook with lard and only skinless chicken breasts, lean beef and lean steak are used. All vegetables are fresh and rice,



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM KILMER

Taste of Mexico: Customers enjoy their lunch in Salsa's Gourmet Mexican 40-seat dining space. In the evenings there's a steady take-out business.

refried beans, black beans and five salsas are made fresh daily."

Five salsas are available from a mild, fruity pineapple, crunchy cucumber, a surprisingly mild, yet flavorful green chile, tasty fresas and red hot. "Some people like it hotter," Shaver said. Regulars know to ask for Steve's hot sauce. A batch, at the ready in the kitchen, can be substituted, added to fresas for extra zip or mixed with the bean dish sides for the same purpose.

Orders look healthy on the simple service of plastic plates. They are not overly topped with cheese and each item stands

alone, not one oozing into the other, smothered in sauce. Tacos and burritos are well folded and easy to handle. The Burrito Grande has a signature grill mark that adds both visual interest and a slightly grilled taste. Shredded beef, which is always used in place of ground beef, is moist as is the chicken.

And then there's dessert, the newest innovation. Called the Desert Special, French vanilla ice cream is smothered in caramel sauce and chopped nuts served in a cinnamon and sugar coated crispy tortilla for \$1.29. Don't fill up on the burritos and

enchiladas! Given the number of Mexican food chain operations, where does Salsa's position itself? "Right in the middle between Chi-Chi's and Taco Bell," English responded without hesitation.

Salsa's also caters and has done groups as large as 70. Party days offer a choice from among four of the eatery's entrees and includes rice, refried beans or black beans, chips, choice of salsa, and plastic table service.

If you're already stressed out with holiday thoughts, at \$5.25 per person, Salsa's will cater,

## Salsa's Gourmet Mexican

• WHERE: 3027 Walton Boulevard, Auburn Hills, in the Walton Village Plaza (west of Squirrel Road); (810) 340-8880.

• HOURS: Monday-Thursday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday & Saturday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Sunday, 9-9 p.m.

• MENU: Good variety of traditional Mexican fare prepared with healthy eating in mind. Kids Choice four-item menu.

• MEATLESS OPTIONS: Refried beans and black beans may be substituted for beef in items such as tacos and burritos.

• HIGHLIGHTS: Burrito Grande made with shredded beef or chicken breast. Whole Lotta Enchiladas with seasoned shredded beef and cheese in corn tortillas. Tacos available in a variety of sizes. Freshly prepared salsas. Unique desserts. No liquor license.

• COST (RANGE): All items under \$5. Kids menu under \$1.50.

• RESERVATIONS: none

• CARRY-OUT: All items with speedy service.

• CREDIT CARDS: None accepted.

pick-up only on weekdays, but weekend delivery is possible.

"We like to do holiday office parties, kids birthdays, graduations and it's not too early to think Super Bowl," English added.

## RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send items to be considered for publication to: Kelly Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric News Services, 38251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313) 591-7270.

## Events

**Somerset Collection**  
WQRS presents Brunch with the Classics noon to 1:30 p.m. Sunday at the Somerset Collection Rotunda in Troy. Brunch prepared by Sebastian's Grill. Cost \$25 per person. Net proceeds benefit the Detroit Symphony Chorus. Call for reservations. (810) 643-7440

## Holiday dinners

**Madrigal Dinners**  
Schoolcraft College is accepting reservations for their 18th annual Madrigal Dinners 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Dec. 7-9, in the College's Waterman Center. Return to the 16th century and dine on Elizabethan fare, and enjoy special "period" entertainment. Cost \$35 per person; tables seat eight. (313) 462-4417

**Detroit Institute of Arts**  
Seats still available for the 24th annual Wassall Feast, Dec. 7-9 and 14-16. Every detail of the feast is planned for the greatest authenticity, from the performers' costumes and dance steps to the music, food and drinkware. The feast runs each evening 6:30-10 p.m. Tickets \$150 per person, or \$125 for 20 or more (two tables), and include valet parking, hosted reception, and commemorative gift. All proceeds support DIA's general operating fund. (313) 833-0005

**New Year's Eve**  
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Braised Beef \$12.95  
Fresh green beans, mushrooms, onions, leeks, carrots, crisp bacon in a light tangy vinaigrette \$12.95  
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