

# Expanding Tradition

New generation opens 2<sup>nd</sup> outlet for Carolina's

New Carolina's has same tasty, filling, cheap eats

By Howard Seftel

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While you're waiting in line to order at the new north Phoenix branch of Carolina's (pronounced "Caro-LI-naz", "Caro-LEE-naz"), take a look at the newspaper clippings hanging on the wall. Carolina's sure has received a lot of good press over the years.

Here's some more.

The original Carolina's (1202 E. Mohave St., Phoenix) is a valley Mexican restaurant institution. Founded by Carolina Valenzuela, it debuted in 1968. Her son, Joe Hernandez, and his wife, Phyllis, carry on the original family business. Now, the third generation is ready to expand the brand and make its own mark.

Daughter Victoria Tiedens and her husband David are running Carolina's second outlet. They've also brought them several longtime employees from the original location to make sure everything goes smoothly. Not surprisingly, this crew has Carolina's formula down pat.

It's a simple one: Serve hearty, high-quality, made-from-scratch Mexican food, and sell it at budget prices. No wonder you may have to wait in line at prime eating hours.

But no one's complaining, even if you do eat with plastic utensils out of plastic-foam boxes or off paper plates. Where else could a family of four eat this well and still get change for a \$20 bill?

Happiness starts with burros. And the start with the best-in-town, oversized flour tortillas, made fresh in the premises daily. (You can buy them by the dozen for \$2.36.) Once you eat these tortillas, you'll never be able to look at supermarket tortillas in sealed plastic bags again.

You'll need both hands to hold burros, which come packed with the first-rate fillings such as sharp red chile beef (\$2.75), zesty homemade chorizo and potatoes (\$2.80) and outstanding machaca (\$2.95), moist shredded beef. But my two favorites are the green chile chicken(\$3), whose harmonious flavor notes range over the entire scale, and the Oaxacan special (\$2.95), bursting with chorizo, potatoes, beans, and cheese.

For pure beefy, hungry-man, nothing tops the beef chimichanga (\$5.25), the most expensive item on the menu. But you won't have buyers remorse. And I guarantee that if you eat this at 7 p.m., you won't be raiding the refrigerator at 10. It's massive, and massively tasty, crammed with beef, deep-fried to a crispy crunch and generously coated with sour cream and guacamole.

Not quite so hungry or quite so deep-pocketed? Turn to Carolina's tacos (\$1.40), which taste nothing like fast-food knockoffs. The soft chicken taco is filled with juicy, tender poultry, while the shredded beef in a hard taco shell supplies flavorful beefy crunch with every bite. Green-corn and red-chile tamales (\$1.30) are other wonderfully cheap and tasty options.

Other Mexican standards are good, if not quite as distinctive as the burros, chimis, tacos, and tamales. They include chicken flautas with guacamole (\$3.55), beef tostada (\$1.75) and beef enchilada (\$1.50).

A driving tip: If you're getting the outstanding cheese tortilla (\$2.65) or fresh made chips and salsa (\$1.29) to go, make sure the kitchen wraps them very tightly. Once you start nibbling in the car, you may come home with the empty box and bag.