



Tacos Al Pastor at Miguel’s Mexican Restaurant in Bangor.

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MAKING MEXICAN FOOD LOCAL

Miguel’s in Bangor finds it niche with unique approach

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

Sous chef Duston Thomas begins crafting the dish with a base of soft corn tortillas. They’re filled with marinated grilled chicken breast, guacamole made fresh that day, mango salsa, cilantro and pickled onions.

He serves up the Tacos Al Pastor on a bright green plate, the fresh ingredients a rainbow of color attractive to the eye and the palate.

Miguel’s Mexican Restaurant at 697 Hogan Road in Bangor isn’t new to the Queen City’s food scene. In fact, it isn’t new at all. It got its start in Bar Harbor in the ’80s under different ownership and passed hands until it ended up under the direction of Chris Jones, a native Mainer and resident of Dedham.

The restaurant opened its Bangor location in 2007 with a rocky start.

“We kind of got a bad name for ourselves in the first few months. We were up, like, 200 percent what we thought sales were going to be, and we just weren’t prepared for that,” Jones said.

Two of the proprietors ended up bowing out, but Jones refused to let go of Miguel’s, believing it had potential. He took over as sole owner in 2009.

“I felt like, if one of us were up here full time, it would make it,” Jones said. He braced himself for the next few years, integrating his extensive travel in Mexico into the menu to create an authentic Mexican experience.

“I lived in Arizona for three years. I go to Mexico every year. I lived right on the border, so I would hop over to Mexico all the time. I have a background in that area and loved the cuisine to begin with,” Jones said. Each time he visits he’s in restaurants, coming up with new ideas to implement at Miguel’s.



Chris Jones is the owner of Miguel’s Mexican Restaurant in Bangor. The restaurant originally opened in the ‘80s in Bar Harbor.

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“In Mexico there aren’t a lot of chain restaurants. They’re all ‘ma and pa’ places,” Jones said. That authenticity was what he hoped to bring back to Maine, adding in a twist with all natural meats and locally sourced products when they’re available.

“It’s karma, essentially,” Jones said. “I want to be able to sleep at night, so what I’m feeding people is important to me.”

He integrates locally sourced foods when he’s able, including tomatoes from Backyard Farms in Madison. He also has been getting his corn tortillas from a Maine source, Tortilleria Pachanga, since July 2014.

“Our tortillas are used with [Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association] MOFGA-certified corn. Not that many restaurants use them because of the price, so it’s nice that Miguel’s does,” Lynn Rowe, owner of Tortilleria Pachanga in Portland, said.

Eggs and honey are sourced locally, as well, and he buys seasonally from local farmers to integrate ingredients into special menus that change each week.

“Our special menu each week has one or

two food items and a couple of drink items that are sourced locally and seasonally,” Jones said. “It allows us to get smaller farms that are at the farmers market. They can’t do a whole restaurant, but they have a couple hundred dollars of stuff they need to get rid of every week. It doesn’t matter to us what they have, as long as we can incorporate it into a dish.”

Because of costs, some things aren’t possible, though, he said.

“There’s some stuff, like pork and chicken, that’s all natural, but we haven’t been able to lock something in that’s local yet because the price is too much,” he explained.

Miguel’s location in Bangor’s shopping district, where there’s much competition from chain restaurants has made pricing a bit more difficult, but the sheer number of people who pass through the area makes it worth it.

“We can’t get what people are charging downtown, and we’re still serving the quality stuff. It hurts a little bit because we can’t charge what we should be charging because people will go across the street to Applebee’s.”

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Cold-pressed juice delivered to your door?

Biddeford company looks to offer health on the go

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Smoothies and juice bars are to 2016 what espresso bars were to 2003. Not entirely new, but taking off and here to stay. While Greater Portland is a far cry from San Diego, where liquid kale in a cup is dispensed from every streetcorner, new concepts abound this spring. They promise health, vibrancy and vitality by the ounce.

At soon-to-launch Maine Juice Co., cold press and organic is the name of the game.

Besides having killer SEO, the newest Biddeford startup is so on trend it hurts. Cold-pressed juice is not in abundance in Maine yet, but the couple, who came across

this healthy beverage while honeymooning in Hawaii, hope it goes down smooth.

“We are offering drinks loaded with greens like kale, collards, mint and arugula,” said Tim Nickerson, who adds spices such as turmeric and oregano oil to juices to ratchet up the health. A 2-ounce elixir shot with ginger, honey, lemon and turmeric delivers “astounding health benefits.”

To extract nutrients at their peak, he employs a 2-ton hydraulic press.

“You get 100 percent of the enzymes, it doesn’t oxidize,” said Nickerson, touting the cold-press benefits that svelte celebs like Tom Brady and Gisele Bundchen have known about for years.

“It slowly grinds it, cold chops



JOE LOEMAN

Fresh-pressed watermelon, grapefruit, orange, kiwi and kale juices from Farm Truck Juice in Portland’s West End.

it to a desired consistency. We scoop it out into a mesh bag and the press squeezes the bag to extract the nutrients. It presses all the enzymes out,” said Nickerson, whose wife, Michelle Bozeman of Brunswick, is a co-owner.

Over in Portland’s gentrifying Munjoy Hill, a new smoothie shop is in the works offering similar wholesome health.

Flying Fox Juice, named after

the largest bats in the world (which sometimes are called fruit bats), is set to open on Washington Avenue in Portland in June. Birch Hincks, who lives in the neighborhood, is building out her first-floor cafe this spring.

“I’m doing veggie smoothies, nothing too sweet,” said the 32-year-old UMaine grad. “I’m on

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Warmer weather, more fun outdoors

“Just look down and keep going,” I told my 10-year-old son, Will, this past weekend as we hiked up Chick Hill in Clifton. It was as much for his benefit as my own.

Though the hike route we took was up a wide road, that didn’t ease the difficulty of the endeavor. At times steep, and almost entirely uphill, the hiking trail wasn’t easy but we got a little closer to the breathtaking views at the top with each step.

Hikes like that are challenging for me because allergies and exercise aggravate my severe asthma. Medicine helps, though, and so does exercising my lungs through such walks.

“You can do it. Just keep going,” I told him, again, as much for myself as him.

And in the end, we did. At the top, we paused to enjoy the views and he agreed that it was breathtaking.

I love hiking, especially with my kids. Nature is beautiful, and there’s so much to explore. Looking out from the summit of Chick Hill, distant mountains, blue lakes, evergreens and trees that haven’t yet woken from winter’s slumber created a patchwork that was stunning.

You just have to pause to take it all in.

There are so many ways to have fun in life, and I’m finding more and more that it’s the adventures that take us out into the world — up trails, out on the water and into places you might not see if you stay only to the beaten path — are my favorite.

We’re approaching the warm months here in Maine, and I can’t wait to have more of these adventures together. You simply can’t build a view as amazing as the natural ones you can find at the top of a trail like the one we took up Chick Hill.

The warmer months also mean more fresh, local food. Bangor’s weekly outdoor farmers market

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SARAH WALKER CARON
MAINE COURSE

Brownie’s coconut cookies

A couple of weeks ago, by sharing with you all Nancy’s Pork Chops and Apples, we remembered Brownie Schruppf, who wrote for this paper. At the very end of the column I asked if anyone of you readers was Nancy, or knew who Nancy is.

Several of you wrote to say you knew Brownie and recalled her fondly. I can’t tell you how grand it was for me to read your notes and to think about Brownie’s influence on lives in our corner of Maine. And, by golly, Nancy of the pork chops herself got in touch.

Nancy Grant was a good friend of Brownie’s. They both grew up in Readfield but since Brownie was older than Nancy, Nancy didn’t get to know Brownie until she was at the University of Maine. They both belonged to an international women’s group, Women of the World, at the university. Meeting monthly, members would cook a meal from their home country, and Brownie and Nancy used to do a Thanksgiving dinner for the group. Nancy recalls that Brownie was a fun person who got along with people very well. Brownie was famous for her Christmas party and for

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