

Miguel Rodriguez, Homi Mexican Restaurant

Interviewed by Laurie Stern at Homi Restaurant, June 28, 2012

Q Can you tell me your name?

A My name is Miguel Rodriguez. I'm from Mexico. I'm part owner of the Homi Restaurant. My dad is the owner. His name is Miguel also. And you guys can reach us at www.homirestaurant.com, 651-222-0695, Lopez Rodriguez

Q So how long have you been here?

A This is our third summer. We just moved in when the previous tenants moved out due to the light rail coming in. So they decided they don't want to (?) during the construction and we just pretty much bought it from them.

Q Did you have a restaurant someplace else before?

A No, we didn't. This is our first investment between my dad, his girlfriend and myself.

Q Why did you want to do it?

A I love cooking food, my dad grew up old school, and a lot of people think that our food is really good so we just pretty much go for it.

Q Why did you want to come to University Avenue?

A We live close by. We used to ride up and down University for many years and we always see this place and once we found out it was for sale, we just kind of go and took it under our wings.

Q I can't remember what was here before.

A It used to be an old Thai restaurant.

Q So it already had the industrial kitchen?

A Yeah, everything was already in place. That's why we decided to go for it since we didn't have to put anything else in it. Just pretty much the turn key business.

Q So how's it been going?

A It's been going all right, yeah. Actually the construction started only at the beginning of the year so we had two years prior to that, which we were kind of

like starting...that was the starting point. Now that the construction came around, well we kind of slowed down a little bit but we're bouncing back from it.

Q So you're not worried about being here next summer or next year?

A It's tough. It is tough, but I think we're going to make it and we are planning to be here for a long time.

Q Who are your customers?

A Neighbors, people that work around the area, around the offices, they come and they love our food so they just come back every day. Some people are here every day during the week, so they eat different things. Our customers are really, really loyal which I appreciate.

Q Tell me what makes your food so special.

A All our food is made from scratch and all our recipes are home recipes, recipes that my grandma or mother used to cook. And we cook it the same way that we did at our home, just in an industrial kitchen. That's pretty much it. So it has the flavor, it has our own personality of who we are. We are – my dad and myself – are from Elago in Mexico, which is the center part and Artez is from Vera Cruz. So they are pretty close to each other, but the Mexican cuisine is so vast that we try to combine or their flavors are...what she has and the flavors that we have they're just melted in a big pot and that's what our food is – a big melting pot of traditions and recipes from Vera Cruz and Elago.

Q How did your families...what brought them to St. Paul from Elago?

A My dad's been in the US for over 25 years. He worked in California for a long time. His family moved here to Minnesota to work and he followed them. We just grew up here. I graduated from Highland Park so we've been here for a long, long time.

Q May I ask your age?

A I'm 34.

Q Have you got children?

A No I don't.

Q So when you look at the future of the business, what do you see?

A I see myself and my Dad...this was a starting business for both of us. So we are trying to expand it and get probably a couple more restaurants in the area.

We are looking into it because people seem to like our food so we're trying to expand, not just to the area of University Avenue but other areas in St. Paul and Minneapolis too.

Q That's great. Anything else you want to say about University Avenue, what you like about it, what you don't like about it?

A University Avenue is so multi-cultural that it makes me feel right in place, you know? We have Latin stores, we have Asian stores, we have Mike's, which is next store and sells steaks, it's Greek. So there's a huge melting pot so I think we just feel right in place due to that fact. We're probably the only ones in the University area that are a Mexican restaurant, but that is where me as an immigrant and my dad as an immigrant – that's what we're here for. To better ourselves and put a little bit of us and leave a mark here on University Avenue.

Q You were starting to tell me before that you were...

A Yeah, we were the first Mexican restaurant in the University area in 48 years, I believe. There used to be a taco place in this area but they closed down. I think they were here for like 6 months and then they were gone; they didn't make it. So now we're proud to be here for three years so...hopefully more years than that.

Q What do you think the impact would be if your restaurant wouldn't be here? Not that it disappears, but if it wouldn't be here in the first place?

A If it wasn't us it would be somebody else who would put the business here, the restaurant due to the fact that this is a growing avenue. And to the future this here...everything's going to happen here in the area. The train's going to be here, people are going to be here, so that's one of the reasons why we invested in this area.

Q Can you wait it out, the slow times?

A Of course, yeah, of course. This means for the past couple months has been so hard...we've got the streets closing and but people are so kind to us that they don't want us to go. So they are coming back and they try to find a way for us to stay here.