

Micho & Mama Dee-licious!

Eat South of the Border in the Northern Tier

Story and Photos by Sarah Bull

Lying alone in the bed of his rented cabin, Mauricio Duron found his mind was jumbled with voices and ideas, a medley as delicious as his wife's crimson menudo. Mmm, that hypnotizing menudo! Now he'd never get to sleep with memories of that savory red broth tickling his deepest cravings. It had been thirty-five minutes since he last glanced at the bright glow of the clock on his nightstand. He had to get to sleep. Soon, his alarm would be screaming at him to get up, get dressed, and climb into his Wyatt Construction truck to head to work. His company had begun working on a new pipeline that wound its way through rugged terrain, and the physical strain his body had been enduring was exhausting—he needed his rest. But something was keeping him awake: the same thoughts that had been marinating in the back of his mind since he'd arrived in Pennsylvania several months prior, and suddenly they all were coming to a sizzling boil that couldn't be ignored.

Mauricio, who goes by "Micho," had always dreamed of owning his own restaurant. From the time he and his wife, Teresa, had moved to Paramount, California, from their home in Durango, Mexico, they had worked in the food industry. Between the two of them they'd worked in nearly every position in the food business at restaurants including Ruby Tuesday, Logan's Roadhouse, and Olive Garden (where Micho was a cook for seven years). But after they moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, Micho was offered a job working for Wyatt Construction and his cooking was reduced to occasional meals at home with his wife and two sons.

But when he was asked to move to northern Pennsylvania with Wyatt Construction to follow the natural gas boom, Micho felt a force

within him that he couldn't ignore. The men he worked with in the gas industry, who'd come from all over the country, would constantly complain that they wanted "good Mexican food." He realized he'd entered a world where the closest semblance of Mexican culture was the drive-thru at Taco Bell. This just wouldn't do. He quickly began formulating a plan and soon his every thought when he wasn't at work was consumed by the development of his new business. If he wanted to do it right he knew he'd need help. But where was he going to find someone who would understand the vision he and Teresa shared so clearly?

His answer came to him as unexpectedly as his middle-of-the-night cravings for his wife's menudo. One night when he was discussing his dream of starting a Mexican restaurant, he stumbled upon a listener who would change his life. Dolores Walker, the owner of the cabin Micho and his co-workers rented in Mansfield, had often discussed with her husband her desire to start a business. As landlords, the Walkers had been able to offer housing to the many workers pouring into the area as a result of the Marcellus Shale gas industry. This rental business had become very profitable for the couple. And so it was that when Micho shared his dream with Dolores—the landlady he'd lovingly come to know as "Mama Dee"—she was willing and able to financially help the Durons turn their dream into reality.

Micho, Teresa, and Mama Dee quickly began developing a plan for their new business. They decided to start small, selling authentic Mexican food from a trailer. With Mama Dee's business sense and financial resources and Micho and Teresa's talent, their business—Micho & Mama Dee's—soon became as hot as the tamales they were serving.

During the day, Teresa would knead, stir,



Teresa Duron (left), Myra Sheetz, and Micho Duron in front of their roadside Mexican eatery, Micho & Mama Dee's.

chop, and fry delicious ingredients alone in the small trailer while Micho worked for Wyatt Construction in Montoursville. Each night when he was done, he would pick up Teresa and the two would go home to marinate meat, chop vegetables, and gather supplies for the next day. So was their routine until September 2011 when a glorious mix of fate and hunger brought a young girl from San Diego to Micho & Mama Dee's.

Noticing the small roadside Mexican eatery one day, Myra Scheetz and her brother stopped, hoping to find authentic back-home food and good conversation in their native Spanish tongue. After devouring two mouthwatering mulitas and four scrumptious

See *Mama* on page 28

Mama continued from page 26

tortas, they were enchanted by the authentic Mexican culture they'd discovered at Micho & Mama Dee's. Mayra, her husband, and her brother started coming back every weekend to delight in the splendors found at their new favorite hangout. Soon, they struck up a friendship, and Micho offered Mayra a job.

In just over a year, Micho & Mama Dee's small orange trailer has gained a reputation throughout the area for delicious Mexican food at a reasonable price. Even their recent move to the Hampson's Farm and Garden Agway parking lot in Wellsboro has not discouraged their loyal customers from Mansfield from driving the extra miles to partake in the wondrous delectables cooked by Teresa, Mayra, and Micho.

"This is the third time I've come here this week!" Mike McConnell, a Shell employee said as he held up his tin-foil-wrapped burrito. "This is why this place is so successful. It's what we miss when we come up here to work for the gas companies. In my opinion, this is the best Mexican food in the entire state of Pennsylvania—and I've been all over."

Other customers are quick to echo McConnell's kudos, some even braving snowy weather to enjoy the Mexican cuisine. Each morning a group of ten to fifteen gas industry workers come as Teresa and Mayra are opening for an enormous Mexican breakfast. Locals are equally impressed with this dining delight, like Charles Klinger who recently came to Micho & Mama Dee's for the first time. "Everybody has been raving about them so I just had to stop," he said over a large bite of corn tortilla. "Mmm. This is so good I might even be back this afternoon!"

Living the dream of starting their own restaurant has not come without its sacrifices for Micho and Teresa. Their two sons remained behind in Tennessee to attend school when the couple moved to Pennsylvania. Though they talk on the phone every day, the divided family misses each other. Despite this, Micho and Teresa's positive attitude and strong belief in the American dream of success is unwavering.

Proudly pointing to the carefully designed sign in front of their trailer, Micho explains why they chose the image of *la salida del*



Micho & Mama Dee's
Location: 11473 Route 6, Wellsboro, PA
Hours: Monday - Saturday, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Phone: (570) 637-7492
Menu: Burritos, tacos, tortas, plain quesadilla, fajita, fajita plate, mulitas, tamales

sol—the sunrise. "This is a reminder to us of why we came to Pennsylvania. The rising sun symbolizes our success in this business and what we hope to achieve here." With hard work and a love of their customers, Micho and Teresa hope to spread the flavor of their culture to the people touched by northern Pennsylvania's *la salida del sol*.

Mountain Home contributing writer Sarah Bull is a graduate of Mansfield University.

We have the best prices in the area on flame resistant clothing and all of your gasfield needs.

Wellsboro Location
 11473 Rt 6, Wellsboro, PA
 570-724-3012

HAMPSON'S AGWAY

Mansfield Location
 401 S. Main St, Mansfield, PA
 570-662-3012

Keystone North, Inc.

Keystone Welding & Fabrication

- In shop & portable welding repair and fabrication
- Mig - Tig - Stick
- Brazing and soldering
- 200 ton press brake
- Steel and aluminum sales
- CNC Plasma cutting up to 1 1/4"
- Bending & shaping to your specifications

77 West Hill Road
 Covington, PA 16917

570-659-5131
 570-659-5513 (fax)

AL'S LEASING INC.
 SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1986

- Storage • Trailer Rentals
- Rent By The Month • Competitive Rates
- Delivered and Spotted At your Facility

Coverage Locations:
 Bradford & Tioga, PA
 Chemung & Steuben, NY

156 prescott Ave
 Elmira Heights, NY 14903

Office Hours: 7:00 - 5:00

607.733.9153 or alsleasing@stny.rr.com

Pine Creek is our backyard

ROUGH CUT LODGE

You may choose from 7 spacious cabins or 6 suites located in The Lodge. Fully-furnished housekeeping cabins and suites located on Pine Creek. Each has 1 to 3 BR, modern kitchen, porch, cable TV, DVD, fireplace & AC. Non-smoking cabins available.

NIGHTLY, WEEKEND & WEEKLY RATES NOW AVAILABLE YEAR ROUND

Rt. 6, 17 miles west of Wellsboro, 2570 Route 6, Gaines, PA 16921
 Your hosts: Doug & Diana Morrison
 814-435-2192 www.roughcutlodge.com