

West County Restaurants

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LUPE'S DINER, a restaurant in Windsor that serves authentic Mexican cuisine, exists because of a dream. Actually it was the dream of Carlos Licea. Remember the Frank Sinatra song, "Give me a kiss to build a dream on, and my imagination will make that dream come true." Well, I think Carlos's wife Lupe must have given him that kiss and together they created LUPE'S DINER.

Lupe said, "You have a dream, you try and give it all you have, and you can do it." About 4 years ago they hired a consultant, talked to friends, wrote a business plan, talked about what they thought would be a perfect menu and started the 8 month process of building their dream. They have been fully involved in creating the restaurant from top to bottom.

The building was a shell and they designed the entire kitchen and dining areas and put together their dream menu for authentic Mexican cuisine. While neither had been involved in working in restaurants, they built on their own skills and hired an experienced chef who was with them for three and one-half years and helped them learn what they needed to know.

Carlos is the expert for operations and maintenance. He and Lupe designed the physical set up and during the construction stage of the restaurant he laid the floor tile.

Lupe came from a successful career as an Office Manager and her management skills have been key to establishing and managing the business. Carlos handles the back of the house duties, including ordering the fresh products, vegetables, fish, meat and the food preparation. Lupe runs the front of the house, handles the finances, and makes sure the customers receive the best of service. Both have learned all parts of the business, including the ability to prepare their fresh and delicious food. Their son, Carlos, is also part of the team working in the restaurant.

You experience a comfortable atmosphere when you dine at Lupe's. Carlos said when customers tell him how great the food was, or how much they

enjoyed the meal, it makes him feel good for the whole day. The Liceas are local (both having attended Healdsburg High School) and their customers are mainly local people. However, Windsor brings in tourists who attend the free Live Concert Series on Thursday evenings during the summer months, or the Farmers Market. For more information on these events go to www.windsorfarmersmarket.com.

The menu is extensive starting with Sopas which include Tortilla soup and seafood stew with a special sauce. On weekends they have Pozole which is a pork and hominy stew. Ensaladas include a house salad or a Caesar or Fajita salad. These can be ordered with strips of chicken to make a substantial lunch for \$8.99, or you can get the Fajita with steak for \$9.49. Of course there are Nachos and quesadillas and flautas which range in price from \$6.50 to \$7.99. For lunch or dinner you create your own combination selecting from enchilada, chile relleno, tostada, tamales or tacos, all served with rice, beans, lettuce and sour cream for \$7.75. The sizzling fajitas with steak is \$12.49. If you prefer mariscos there is a wide selection which includes crab enchiladas, fish tacos, cod fish fillet, and five different prawn dishes, all for \$11.49

They also have Tortas (Mexican style sandwich), burritos, tacos and chimichanga, which range from \$6.49 to \$11.49. And for those of us who like to eat breakfast anytime of the day they serve Desayunos all day long. There are several options for huevos or chilaquiles priced from \$8.99 to \$10.50. In addition they have wine, beer, soft drinks and a selection of desserts.

They tell me that freshness and consistency are their guidelines for preparing their cuisine. I think what makes the food so good is the fact that they do the basic preparation in small batches three times a day: morning, afternoon, and evening. This makes for a 11 or 12 hour day for both Lupe and Carlos but they split up the duties and have a very competent staff. The restaurant is comfortable with booths and tables and a nice patio overlooking the park.

LUPE'S DINER is located at 710 McClelland Drive, Windsor. This is on the west side of Windsor across from the park. It is open 7 days a week from 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. The phone number is 707 836 0150. You can also pick up a take out menu and order your food ahead of time to attend one of the concerts in the park or for a Sunday picnic. Or enjoy their patio and treat yourself to a Margarita made with Los Cabos Agave, some delicious Mexican cuisine and a glass of Kendall-Jackson Meritage or ice cold beer. Now doesn't that sound festive?