

Mexicali Allie's Tortilla Soup is Headed for Stardom!



Restaurateur Sandy Blake's recipe will soon be featured in the pages of Bon Appetit!

Sandy Blake's first job was at a restaurant on Grand River and Lahser when she was 13 and got a job there waitressing. "I realized I wanted to cook instead. I had nine brothers and sisters so I had to cook a lot at home. I love to cook. That's all I want to do is cook. And so I started cooking there when I was 15."

"Anything about food! I like to look at it, clean it, cut it up. I process all my own beef. I just cut two sirloin tips for burritos. Everything we do here is from scratch. Everyday I cook rice, beans, chili. I cook raw chickens, I pick them and cook them in the sauce. Because I make everything here I have a lot of gluten free. I have a lot of Weight Watchers people who come in and I can do their points program for them because I know every single item that's in there."

Sandy tries to keep it as close to the original Mexican recipe as possible. On Fridays she does specials. "I do fish specials and people say 'This is the best fish I've ever had and I've never had it cooked that way before.'"

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS IN HOWELL

Mexicali Allie's has been at the same location, 117 N. Michigan Ave. in Howell since 1995. "Finally, after 15 years I have the restaurant I set out for. It's a small business in a small town. My customers here call it their 'Cheers.' Everybody knows everybody else here. They come here on Fridays because they know everybody's going to be here. They exchange Christmas gifts and birthday presents. It's the business I've always dreamed of. I finally have it!"

Last year Sandy won (Detroit WYCD 99.5 FM) Young Country's "Best Mexican Restaurant" award. It was all over the radio.

FAVORITE MENU ITEMS?

"I'm going to have to say the Botanas. We do sell a lot of the Chimichangas. and probably the combination plates because they give you a big selection. The King Combo has 5 items on it. We have a couple of dishes that are really spicy. People are eating hotter food right now. We have a taco with a smokin' hot sauce on it. Tacos Pueblonas and Enchiladas Ranchero, I mean they're hot! They addictively hot!"

The photos shown are of the Botana, King Combo and the Tortilla Soup. And the Tortilla Soup is the recipe that going to be in Bon Appetit Magazine. It's actually a customer request. They wrote into the RSVP section of Bon Appetit. You write in to them and you say "I've been to this restaurant and they have a really great meal. Would you please get the recipe!"

"And, so I got a letter from Bon Appetit." Blake explained. "And they don't tell you who requested the recipe until it comes out in the magazine. They'll print the customer's letter and they print your recipe."

Bon Appetit is a food magazine. It's all about food from



The King Combo, left and the Botana, right are favorites here!

cover to cover. It has an RSVP section where folks write to the magazine and say they've been to a restaurant and enjoyed a item. And they ask the editor to please request the recipe.

SHE ALMOST THREW THE LETTER AWAY

So a customer fell in love with her Tortilla Soup and asked for it to be featured in Bon Appetit. "I got the letter and didn't open it because I thought it was just a subscription letter. I was going to throw it in the trash because my subscription doesn't expire until 2015. But it was addressed to Owner, Manager, Chef. So I thought I'd better read it and it was from Barbara Fairchild, the editor!"

So she tested it, remaking it and remaking it to make sure it would translate well. "Because the supplies I use might not be available for them to use." She explained. The different peppers and other ingredients may not be available. "So I did it and I tested it and sent it back. Now I'm just waiting for the release date."

Tortilla soup contains chicken and corn and beans, cheese, tortillas, spices, lots of peppers. It's a spicy soup. Blake usually only makes it in the winter because it's kind of heavy and too spicy for the heat of the summer.

Seating Capacity at Mexicali Allie's is about 40.

Sandy places an ad in The Marketeer almost every month. "Nothing works for me like The Marketeer." She says. You have to do something to keep your name out there. So why wouldn't I spend my money where I get the results? And I do find that this is the magazine that people read.

Mexicali Allie's is located at 117 N. Michigan Ave, Howell. Phone: (517) 548-7333. Open Monday 11-2; Tues., Wed., Thur., 11-7:30; Fri., 11-8:30 and Sat., 1-7:30. "It's a family restaurant." Explains Blake. "We don't have alcohol. It's all about the food here."