

The Dominican Kitchen – Staying Connected to Culture

By Scott Laird

Growing up in Rhode Island, Ashley Martinez spent a lot of time with her grandmother who was from the Dominican Republic. Spending time in the kitchen with her mother, aunts, and grandmother she developed a love for Dominican culture and especially Dominican cooking. Now she is sharing that love with her new community in Vernonia.

Martinez has started a business, The Dominican Kitchen, and is offering her food on Sundays by pre-order, with delivery around noon. Currently she is making both pastelitos, a baked handheld pastry turnover, and tamales.

"I grew up around this food," explains Martinez. "My mother worked full-time and she had my grandparents watch me and my siblings all the time. They lived in the Dominican Republic half the year, so we would usually spend our summers there. It was always so much fun because we could just be kids. It's very different. You're on an island and no one wears shoes and people

are out taking showers in the rain."

She's preparing her food at the new Senior Center kitchen and is hoping to try some new items. She's also doing some catering and is looking to occasionally have a pop-up stand at the Senior Center for walk-ups. Her business is a work in progress as she finds out what people like and what she can work into her schedule.

Martinez moved to Vernonia with her boyfriend about two years ago and they live with their two children on a property his family owns on Timber Road. "It's one of the most beautiful places I've ever been," says Martinez. "And the community here is just so kind and welcoming... just really beautiful people."

Martinez says being around strong and intelligent women all her life was a blessing



The food from the Dominican Kitchen is definitely tasty. It's also very affordable and that has been on purpose, says Martinez. "I wanted to feed people and keep the prices cheap. Nothing is affordable anymore. And I wanted to help people out. I enjoy cooking and I genuinely enjoy helping people."

When she's not making Dominican food for the community, Martinez has been working at the Vernonia Senior Center where she is the Administrative Assistant. "I've been helping Tobie Finzel with all the things she does – she does so much for that center," she says. "Along with Theresa Kilgore, we've just been trying to get everything organized as the center has finally been able to open. It's been a really important service for our seniors who need some socialization."

"COVID put a burden on a lot of things and it's been hard for a lot of people," says Martinez. "I just

wanted to share some love through my food. I feel like people just need more love in their lives. And I feel like that's what my food embodies. I think of my grandmother every single time I cook. She had a tremendous influence on me and my life and everything that I do. Every time you hear that Dominican music playing in the kitchen, you know I'm dancing. That woman had so much love in her heart and that's the way I'm trying to be in my life – the way she was towards other people. She treated everyone like they were a beautiful flower."

To see the current offerings and schedule for the Dominican Kitchen you can check out the Facebook page or contact Ashley Martinez at 401-771-2850.

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