

Yolanda and Antonio Compos



Chicken Tacos and Drunken Nachos

Piles of food for the munchie-crazed BY PHIL GETTY

Feverishly laboring behind the register of a dinky Mexican taquería in Springfield was José Antonio Compos, the 26-year-old son and non-stop workhorse of Antonio and Yolanda Compos, proprietors of El Taco Express. I asked about featuring his family's food for *EW*.

"For real, man?" He appeared surprised.

"Sure, why not? Your food is *el mejor* and people deserve to try it."

"You want to order, man?" José asked.

"Let me take a look," I said, which was ridiculous considering I'd had the massive menu memorized for months. The selections of unique interpretations of classic Latin dishes and imaginative original family creations were on the tip of my tongue.

Yolanda's handmade tamales are a great place to start at \$1.50 each. Order a dozen or more for a south-of-the-border party, and she'd cut a break.

There is something special about party foods, pairing piles of fried corn chips, pounds of toppings and binge drinking. The super nachos' status as most frequently ordered item is no surprise considering El Taco's proximity to University Commons, Chase and Duck Villages, driving distance for most partying students. Super nachos (\$5) are a temptation too great.

Taste Antonio's selections of dinner plates and his signature enchiladas, folded, not rolled, for added filling space. Choices also range from carne asada to mojarra (fresh tilapia, fried), Mexican rice, refries, avocado slices and a large stack of warm corn tortillas — hombre-size dishes at \$7.

Consider one of 16 burritos coming wet or dry (\$4-\$5). The *el super*, José's fave, combines steak picado, chile relleño, rice, beans, guac, sour cream and cheese, wrapped in an oversize flour tortilla. There is a burrito for everyone's tastes, even vegetarians.

Devour a torta Cubana flatbread, awesome in every sense: ham, hand-

breaded steak and chicken with thick slices of avocado, cheese, onion, tomatoes and lettuce smothered in spicy homemade chipotle chili sauce. Alfonso, the younger brother, is credited with this culinary creation. Word to the wise: Not for petite appetites.

"*Dos tacos dorados con pollo, por favor*," I said, practicing my Spanish. "Side o' guac and an apple soda, please."

I'm hooked on stuffed crispy corn tortillas overflowing with thick chunks of marinated chicken, iceberg, ripe tomatoes and cheese (\$1.50). Splurge \$1.50 for a side of homemade guacamole for dipping and \$1.25 for a Mexican-style soda to wash down a large bite of grilled jalapeño.

I appreciate service, and El Taco has never let me down. They bust their asses through long weeks, providing great food and service that most people demand but rarely deserve. I've shown up at 10 minutes to close, crazed from strong drink and mad with munchies, demanding six chicken tacos, three tamales, super nachos, steak, chicken and veggie — lots of water. They were nothing short of *gracias* — big tip.

After a few moments daydreaming of drunken nights past while scanning the few adornments to the Mexican minimalist motif (paintings, video games, colorful blankets, saw blades) lunch was ready.

José still questioned my motivation behind writing the story; I explained further. Value: working-class fare at working-class prices. Alcohol: The liquor license is coming, so beer and wine will be available soon. Public service: Advising drunken students who risk life and limb driving while suffering from stumbling hunger to take a cab. Finally, residents have an excuse to venture over I-5 to our poorly lit stepsister city in the east.

Give in to tasty temptation. *Vayan* to El Taco Express.

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