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From Mexico to Metroplex to Mound

By John LaVine - Contributing Writer

When Fernando Padilla made the move northward, from Mexico to Dallas, he thought that would be the extent of his migration. Then, he went a little bit farther – and found Flower Mound. *He saw what we saw: an idyllic suburb just minutes from the city line and the airport.* “Flower Mound has a nice pace. It’s a growing town – but you make a turn, and suddenly there’s a pasture with horses or cattle,” Fernando explains. “This town has the feel that Dallas used to have, where people can leave their doors unlocked at night.”



Photo by T & E Photo

Fernando Padilla, owner of Fernando's Mexican Cuisine, is glad that he has found the Mound.

Well, the police department might not recommend that, but better here than in Dallas, for sure. Fernando didn't grow up in a quiet little town, there, but in the metropolis of Mexico City. Just how did he end up in Dallas? “I was a high school exchange student. I came here for just one year. One year became two years. When I returned to Mexico City, I was unable to get right into the university there. But, as I'd already been accepted into the University of Texas at Arlington, I came back here.” Fernando majored in hotel and food & beverage management. He worked in restaurants throughout his college years, as he had during high school. “In high school, I began as a busboy at the old *Ports o' Call* restaurant, in Dallas. I made my way up over the years, serving as Captain at *Brenmans*.” “I had a job offer when I graduated from college, so, naturally, I stayed. Then, I met my wife, Anne, here, so...” Fernando doesn't look at the United States as just a place to make a buck, either. “I'm the biggest, most grateful fan of Uncle Sam,” he extols, looking around, spreading his arms. “It is a privilege and an honor to be here. Both my wife and I are U.S. citizens.” As for starting his own business in America, Fernando gives much of the credit for his success to one man. “I'd worked in the restaurant business for a long time and thought I knew it all. Then, I went to work for Mario Messina, the proprietor of Dallas' *Il Sorrento*, since 1949. I learned a lot there, serving as Maitre D' for 12 years. Mario helped me to get my priorities straight, to focus my attention towards the customers.” “I opened *Fernando's*, at Midway and North west Highway, three and one-half years ago. It's really been a smashing success. Frankly, when I began looking to open a second location, I looked all over, up through the U.S. 75 corridor, too, with the help of my good friend, developer David Watson. When he showed me one of his own properties – here on 2499, just south of 407 - and I saw the quality of life and people, combined with the ongoing and potential growth, I told him that this is where I wanted to come, without any influence of our friendship necessary.” Just how has Fernando put the lessons he learned at *Il Sorrento* to use? “We offer a beautiful restaurant, offering good food at a fair price,” he explains. “We take care of customers' wants and special needs.” Examples? “One gentleman had a broken jaw,” Fernando remembers, not missing a beat. “His teeth were wired shut. We got him some oversized straws and blended a thick soup-like meal for him which he could eat this way.” Hey - this could be a great new diet idea, sans the jaw wiring. “We've hired mariachi bands for weddings and birthdays,” Fernando adds. “We're very family oriented. We have crayons for the kids. People can come in fl ip-fl ops if they want – but you'll also see people dressed very nicely on dates.” “We're Tex-Mex, but very flexible on the menu, always conscious of the customers' needs, should they want the traditional enchiladas or on up to grilled shrimp or fillets. We have wines from moderately priced to fine.” “We do offer *Mexico City dining*, for those who prefer authentic Mexican.” The walls of the bar area are adorned with jai alai pictures, as well as mounted scoops and baskets. It must be very hard to now run two restaurants. “It is, but I have two managers at each location who have financial interests, so customers are always treated like valued clients. That is what we really enjoy, meeting different people, getting to know names and faces, making friends.” How involved is your family? My wife handles the

books, payroll, and watches over the legal side. My sons, Fernando Jr., 20, and Jorge, 19, have both worked here, but don't have the business in their immediate futures. They're both enrolled at Texas Tech, but Fernando Jr. is currently studying abroad at the University of Barcelona. "I fear he'll stay overseas, as I stayed in America," laments Fernando Sr. "He has to live his own life, but as his father, I'd certainly hope that he'd travel plenty, but live back here," he admits. As for Fernando Sr., you can take the boy out of the city, be it Mexico or Dallas, but can you truly take the city out of the boy? **"Flower Mound is the place to be. It's like Dallas was 35 years ago."**