

Serving up Good Food and Good Deeds -- Viva Tito's Tacos!

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Alma Bautista, the restaurant's 25-year-old General Manager, who started with Tito's Tacos at 19 as a part-time server, believes Davidson and Morton "are a true inspiration and I'm grateful to work alongside them. Lynne and Wirt love what they do and are very passionate when it comes to their business. They have encouraged me to continue forward and to never give up. Honestly, this business thrives because they are hands on."

She explained that "Lynne works at the restaurant seven days a week, while Wirt is responsible for all our media and advertising. He does all the behind-the-scenes work with both our restaurant and commissary and they both are the reason for why Tito's is what it is. Lynne and Wirt are a power couple who not only continue to grow their restaurant but who also donate to our community, whether it's schools, organizations or individuals who are trying to better themselves. I believe our October 4th celebration will be a sensation, since all proceeds will be donated to the Culver City Cultural Affairs Foundation. The community can all come together and contribute to a great cause, while enjoying themselves with family and loved ones."

Tito's Tacos sounds like a great place to work, especially after learning from Morton that it "has almost 95 employees with the full-time employees receiving full medical and dental insurance coverage for their families, unlike most other restaurants in America."

Morton also shared an array of interesting facts, including that "the restaurant's founder met his wife, who happened to be a Mexican national, on the beach in Santa Monica, California; the original cost for a Tito's Taco was 19 cents almost 60 years ago; the food is prepared daily from treasured top-secret recipes; over 500,000 pounds of quality beef are purchased every year and immediately trimmed of excess fat by our trained meat cutters before being slow-cooked to perfection; Daily Meal selected Tito's burritos as America's #1 Best Burrito in America in 2015, saying "It's simply perfect, and it's America's Best Burrito"; the produce goods are procured every day of the week at around 3 a.m. in the downtown L.A. Produce Mart, including those most important avocados; the traditional stone-ground corn tortillas are cooked fresh every day of the week starting at 2 a.m.; the flour tortillas are made with an added ingredient in order to make them taste better than most other flour tortillas being served to customers at most any other Mexican food restaurants; and many of the Tito's Tacos key ingredients are shipped in from out-of-state to achieve the same traditional taste that has made Tito's Tacos so well-liked over the years."

As for who the "Tito" is in Tito's Tacos, Morton responded that "there are so many versions that it's too hard for us to point out which one is the spot-on correct one, although what's sort of interesting is that many patrons over the years would point out that the very first employee hired at the restaurant back in 1959 was Amado Madera. They would state that they knew as a fact that he was the namesake of the business. His jovial personality was heartwarming, his eyes twinkled happiness and the eatery's customers had fond affection for him. Amado Madera retired a number of years ago and remains a longtime Culver City resident."

Morton described the involvement of Madera's family.

"His brother, Javier Renteria, is a longtime Culver City resident and was the executive chef and manager of the Tito's Tacos commissary for many years, also located in Culver City – and his son, Javier Jr., owns and operates Mutual Farms Produce, which is responsible for procuring fresh vegetables and produce for the restaurant from the downtown Los Angeles Produce Market early every morning. The name 'Tito' can mean 'Uncle' in some Mexican families – and Lynne always thought of these two older men, who contributed a lot to the success of the restaurant, as her 'little uncles' and still does to this day."

The commissary is where magic happens.

"We have the only taco-folding machine," Morton said. "It's like something out of Mad Magazine! Earlier there were 12-15 women folding tacos. Now they run the machine. We're obsessed with health issues and have a full-time health person here. We have many long term employees, including a meat cutter who's been here 43 years."

He explained that "the chili con carne is cooked for over three hours every morning. From five or six in the morning the place is full of wonderful scents, like the refried beans that we also refry at the restaurant."

The flavors live up to the aromas, because Tito's Tacos has been repeatedly cited for excellence in numerous publications and on television news programs.

Just some examples include being designated in Daily Meal as a top location for delicious tacos and burritos, among the best in America. Tito's Tacos was highlighted for serving up some of the "Best Cheap Eats in the USA 2013" by the Urban Spoon, competing with myriad American fast-food eateries, and was listed in Travel & Leisure under "Best Tacos in America." The restaurant was also recognized by Tech Times as one of the top "20 Places Where You Can Get the Best Tacos in the U.S." And L.A. Weekly was impressed by the tacos, concluding, "Everybody loves Tito's."

Us Weekly included the following statement from Julianne Hough of Dancing With the Stars: "I always stop at Tito's Tacos on my way home from the L.A. airport." That's not surprising, as the food is consistently superb and the long lines of devoted diners often include celebrities. Many loyal customers have passed down their love for the cuisine as a generational legacy to their families.

Tito's Tacos not only turns out great food, it truly operates with heart.

"As a 48-year resident and five-time Mayor of Culver City I am very familiar with Tito's Tacos," said Paul Jacobs. "It has been an intricate part of all segments of our community, providing support for charitable organizations fighting cancer and arthritis, police departments, the Culver City Unified School District sports programs, and many other social and religious programs for the needy. From my personal experience, Tito's Taco's has never failed to respond to requests for food or funding for worthwhile causes."

Marcus G. Tiggs, Chair of the 2016 Fiesta La Ballona, added that "for more than a decade Tito's Tacos has consistently been a silver sponsor supporting the Culver City Fiesta La Ballona, an annual celebration to inspire and promote tolerance, understanding, goodwill and better relations between all people. We are fortunate to be able to count on Tito's each year to make the Fiesta a reality for our city."

"On behalf of Voluntary Service and the patients at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, West Los Angeles Facility, we wish to thank Tito's for sponsoring lunch for America's Heroes," said Carrie Brandlin. "The patients really look forward to this delicious meal. We are most grateful to receive this donation for four years."

Not surprisingly, Tito's Tacos received the 2017 Restaurant Neighbor Award from the California Restaurant Association Foundation (CRAF) for its extensive philanthropic and community efforts in good times and bad.

CRAF Executive Director, Alycia Harshfield, stated that "this award recognizes and honors the generosity and diversity of our industry. Each award winner enriches their community in meaningful ways and we are proud to honor them."

For Davidson, "what really makes this accolade even more special is the fact that Tito's Tacos was nominated by a longtime Culver City resident, Ms. Andi Philips, who also happens to be an acclaimed ProStart Culinary & Hospitality Management Instructor with the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies."

The CRAF-sponsored ProStart Program is a two-year program for highly motivated high school juniors and seniors to help them prepare for future careers in the ever-changing restaurant industry. In California local restaurateurs such as Tito's Tacos donate time and resources to help the students succeed in whatever role they are best suited for in the food service industry.

A list of significant instances of Tito's Tacos' commitment to nonprofit organizations in the greater Los Angeles area just this year includes food and/or monetary donations involving the following: Arthritis Foundation, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Culver City Centennial Celebration Culver City Homeless Count, Culver City High School football team, Didi Hirsh Mental Health Services, Fiesta La Ballona, Los Angeles Police Officers (Pacific Division), Saint Augustine Catholic Church, Toys for Tots, Culver City Police National Night Out, and the Veterans Administration for Greater Los Angeles.

And the honors keep coming.

On June 19th of this year Davidson was the proud recipient of the Small Business of the Year award presented in Sacramento by Senator Holly Mitchell in conjunction with the California Small Business Association and California Small Business Day.

Davidson is a state board member of the California Restaurant Association, currently president of its Los Angeles County Chapter, and a Political Action Committee Trustee. "They keep me busy," she said. "It's fun!"

The restaurant business has been an active part of her life since childhood, and she shared a special memory from the summer of 1966.

"I was 12 and I worked here in the summer," she said. "I used to run to the tables to clear them, to beat the customers, and after four hours I was just exhausted. I earned 25 cents an hour from my grandfather. I was clearing a table and I found one customer had left a tip of fifty cents – equal to two hours of work! – with a note: 'For the cutest little waitress.'"

When she came to work full time in 1971 she asked her grandfather for weekends off. "His response," she recalled, "was 'No. If it isn't convenient for you to come when my customers come, I don't need you.' That was my first lesson in retail, and I worked weekends."

She still does.