



Lambertville Mexican restaurant puts its emphasis on family

Susan Sprague Yeske,
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El Tule

49 N. Main St., Lambertville, NJ

(609) 773-0007, Facebook

HOURS: Tue.-Thu. 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri.-Sat. 11 a.m.-10 p.m., Sun. 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Closed Monday.

CREDIT CARDS: Most major.

FOOD: Good to very good **Mexican** food made with care and quality ingredients using **family** recipes. Look for **Peruvian** dishes on the menu in the near future.

SERVICE: Cheerful and attentive.

AMBIENCE: Freshly redecorated by the new owners, the small **restaurant** is cheerful and bright with south-of-the-border décor.

COST: Soup \$4, tacos \$2, salads \$5-\$9.50, entrees and platters \$10-\$17. Lunch \$6.50-\$10.50.

In the **Mexican** state of Oaxaca is the world's largest tree, a cypress called El Árbol del Tule, believed to be between 1,500 and 3,000 years old and often called the tree of life.

El Tule, Lambertville's latest **Mexican restaurant**, takes its name from the ancient cypress. "The tree symbolizes **family** over business," explains Vanessa Egoavil, whose **family** opened the new **restaurant** with partner/chef Beto Arias in January. "For us, the **restaurant** is **family**."

El Tule is very much a **family** operation, with father Fausto Egoavil running the front of the house, his son-in-law Said Anguiano working as sous chef and daughters Vanessa and Mechelle working as servers. Soon, Fausto's wife Carmen will be working there as well, preparing recipes from the **family's** native Peru.

The Egoavils emigrated here 19 years ago and fell in love with Lambertville while attending church at St. John the Evangelist. After opening a **restaurant** in Peru, they knew they wanted to have one here. "We love the **restaurant**. We **put** all our hearts into it from the beginning," says Vanessa Egoavil.

While the Peruvian portion of the menu is slated for the future, and a planned breakfast menu is still in the works, El Tule is currently serving Arias' traditional **Mexican** fare made to order using fresh ingredients. The menu has many standard favorites such as tacos, quesadillas

and burritos, plus hearty platters featuring beef, chicken and fish.

We started with soups, \$4. El Tule offers three each day: Standard are chicken and vegetable and tortilla soup. Beef was featured as the soup of the day that day, with a flavorful broth, plenty of beef cubes and vegetables and a peppery bite. Also peppery was the tortilla soup, with fresh, crunchy tortilla strips floating in a tomato-based broth with chicken, avocado and cilantro. The chicken and vegetable soup was the mildest of the three, a traditional combination of good broth, chunks of chicken and vegetables.

Chips and salsas are served upon seating, but for more flavor we tried an order of nachos, \$6.50, served with refried beans, guacamole, melted cheese and sour cream.

El Tule has a la carte items such as tacos and burritos, but we opted for the platters, which include a choice of white or Spanish rice and black or refried pinto beans.

Pollo con limon y nopales, \$12.50, was a hefty chicken breast marinated in lemon juice and olive oil. Piled **on** top of the chicken were strips of sautéed cactus, which tasted surprisingly like green pepper.

Pescado ranchero, \$14, was a **Mexican** twist **on** pan-seared tilapia. The generous portion of fish was served over a bed of flavorful, freshly sautéed spinach and topped with a tomato chipotle sauce.

The fish and spinach were good enough that they really didn't need the sauce. If we ordered it again we would ask for it **on** the side.

From the menu of traditional **Mexican** dishes we chose a trio of enchiladas, \$12.50, and a chile relleno, \$10 plain or \$12 with chicken or beef. The enchiladas came filled with a choice of cheese, chicken or beef and topped with a mildly spicy green pepper sauce.

The batter-dipped chile relleno was cooked to a perfect tenderness, stuffed with queso fresco, the **Mexican** fresh cheese, and bits of white meat chicken. It was topped with a mild tomato sauce.

For vegetarians in search of a **Mexican** meal, El Tule has plenty to offer, including a vegetable lasagna, \$12.50, layered with spinach tortillas, cheese and vegetables.

Desserts are traditional. We like the bunuelos con helado de vainilla, \$6, a layer of fried flour tortilla topped with cinnamon sugar and vanilla ice cream. At El Tule the dessert is drizzled with sugar cane syrup instead of the honey sometimes found at other **restaurants**.

Even better was the flan Napolitano, \$5, a creamy baked custard with lots of flavor. Not as good was arroz con leche du rom, \$5; a rum-spiked rice pudding, it lacked sweetness and had no hint of rum.

The Egoavil **family** members and chef Arias are working hard to create a **restaurant** that offers both traditional items and a variety of American-**Mexican** hybrid dishes. Their enthusiasm and attention to detail makes the **restaurant** worth a visit, while the promise of Peruvian dishes to come adds an additional enticement.