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## EL TULE – WHERE FAMILY AND FINE DINING MEET

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In the small Mexican town of Santa Maria del Tule, the roots of one of the oldest and largest trees on our planet continue to grow deeper into the earth. Having held silent watch for over 2,000 years and featuring a trunk greater than 160 feet in circumference, the Arbol del Tule is both praised and revered by the native people. A little closer to home, the tree's symbolic majesty resonates, as well.



When Jack Egoavil and his family relocated to the United States from Peru in 1992, they sought the opportunities their new home offered. And when the chance to realize the family's dream of owning and operating their own restaurant began to materialize, there was no turning back. "We purchased the business in December 2010 and completely renovated," says Jack, co-owner of El Tule Restaurant, located at 49 North Main St. in Lambertville. "We opened a month later. We chose the name, because it symbolizes a family tree, family ties. Family is very important to us. We were taught that growing up, and we want that tradition to carry on to the next generation."

While El Tule was previously the home of another restaurant also offering Mexican fare, the Egoavils have infused their eatery with a vibe all its own. The spirit of family in the kitchen translates to the dining room and leaves a lasting impression on all who have discovered their unique epicurean flavor, fast making El Tule a favorite among discerning diners. "My father, Fausto Egoavil, myself and my sisters, Michelle and Silvia Egoavil, work the front of the house," Jack explains. "My brother-in-law, Said Anguiano, creates the Mexican cuisine while my mother, Carmen Egoavil, is the master of Peruvian food. Everybody chips in."

With differing culinary cultures competing in a single kitchen, El Tule's Mexican-Peruvian fusion concept was born. "Everything we prepare is freshly made," Jack says. "When you order our Guacamole de Casa, we are in the kitchen chopping avocados seconds later." Offering a wide array of Mexican fare, the Ensalada de Nopales is an ensemble of crisp lettuce, queso fresco, avocado and cactus in a cilantro dressing. Entrees include the Pollo con Limon Nopales, chicken breast marinated in lemon juice and olive oil with cactus, and the Spinach-and-Lump-Crab Enchilada, sautéed spinach with lump-crab meat, garlic and green sauce topped with melted cheese.

And while the Mexican cuisine is certainly a reason for El Tule's growing popularity, it's the Peruvian offerings that are enticing area palates. Infusing traditional dishes with modern sensibilities, Carmen has crafted a menu that blends the many influences Peruvian food incorporates. "If you look at Peru's history, you have the Incas and the Spanish," Jack explains. "There are the native recipes, and, under Spanish rule, you find European influences, as well as those from the African and Chinese populations. It creates a gastronomically rich array of food, featuring grains from the Andes and seafood from the Peruvian coast. It all adds up to nutritious but very flavorful fare."

After receiving her culinary education cooking for her family in their native country, Carmen uses three essential Peruvian spices in most of her nowfamous recipes: aji amarillo, aji rocoto and aji panca. The Taboule Quinoa is an Incan-style dish, consisting of quinoa, a gluten-free whole grain, and amaranth garnished with avocado and heart of palm. "I've been eating this dish since I was 13 years old," Jack says, a testament to the authenticity offered at El Tule.

And for those seeking a true cultural and culinary adventure, El Tule offers a Peruvian sampler to familiarize their patrons with their menu. The plate includes appetizer-size portions of the Papa Rellena, fried mashed potatoes stuffed with meat sauce served with red onions, avocado salad and aji amarillo; the Causa de Pollo, a cold mashed-potato cake filled with chicken and vegetables; the Palta a la Reina, half an avocado stuffed with shrimp salad, red onions, tomatoes and corn marinated with a fresh cilantro-lime dressing; and Yucca Fritas with salsa huancaína. Now featuring six ceviches, varying mixtures of red onions, cilantro, rocoto peppers, sweet and white potatoes and corn served with corvinas or a seafood mixture, the dish is quickly growing into another crowd favorite. Along with these selections, El Tule also offers two rotating entrees and appetizers every two weeks, so return visits are not only earned, but also recommended. Rounding out the Peruvian wonders is the Parihuela, which comes highly recommended by the Egoavil family if you're feeling a little, well, under the weather. "The Parihuela is a seafood soup cooked with rocoto peppers and Peruvian beer," Jack says. "It's a great cure for a hangover. My grandfather says it will raise the dead."

El Tule offers indoor and outdoor dining. Guests are also free to bring their own wine or alcohol of choice. And as summer fast approaches, the Egoavil family is excited to introduce new dining options and tastes to the area. "People around here have traveled a lot, so if they aren't familiar with our menu, they are always willing to try it," Jack says. "And for those that have been to Latin or South America, our menu is a chance to revisit some of the local dishes they may have enjoyed. Peruvian food isn't all that prevalent, but if you like it, it's much easier than a trip to Manhattan or Philadelphia. We really want to spice things up."