

By Ingrid Weidman
Photos by Wendy McCardle

El Tule

Flavorful Family Food From the Heart



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, one of the owners 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 it, 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, and chefs Beto Arias and Alvaro Hernandez create 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-Latin 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, sauteed spinach with lump-crab meat, garlic and green sauce topped with melted cheese.

And while the Mexican cuisine is a primary reason for El Tule's growing popularity, it's the Peruvian offerings that keeps them coming back. Carmen, uses three essential Peruvian spices in most of her 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.

For those seeking a true cultural and culinary adventure, El Tule offers a Peruvian sampler to familiarize you 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 in a fresh cilantro-lime dressing; and yucca fritas with salsa huancaína. The ceviche, a mixture of red onion, cilantro,



“When you order our guacamole de casa, we are in the kitchen chopping avocados seconds later.” – Jack Egoavi

rocoto pepper, sweet and white potatoes and corn served with corvina or a seafood mixture, at El Tule is another crowd favorite. And rounding out the Peruvian wonders is the parihuela, which comes highly recommended by the Egoavil family if your feeling a little, well, under the weather. “The parihuela is a seafood soup cooked with rocoto peppers and Peruvian beer,” Jack says. “Its a great cure for a hangover. My grandfather says it will raise the dead.”

El Tule offers indoor and outdoor dining. Guests are free to bring their own wine or alcohol of their choice. And as summer fast approaches, the Egoavil family is excited to introduce new dining options 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. “We hope to start offering food from all different regions of Latin America. We really want to spice things up.” **54**

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