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As Anna's celebrates quinceañera, taqueria's 'father' reflects on success

Posted by Matt Rocheleau March 21, 2011 03:00 PM

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(Globe file photo / Adrienne Lavidor-Berman)

It's been 15 years since Anna's Taqueria first opened shop in Coolidge Corner. Anna's father, Mike Kamio, discussed the six-location chain's simple, yet successful history.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Mike Kamio is the founder and owner of [Anna's Taqueria](#). But, the Wellesley resident with a title-less business card doesn't go by either designation.

"Anna's is Anna's. I'm not Anna's. If anything, Anna's is my daughter, and I have six of them," he said in a recent phone interview.

Kamio's eldest "daughter," a native and lifelong Coolidge Corner resident, is celebrating a 15th anniversary this year alongside her five sisters.

In many Latin American communities, when a girl turns 15, family and friends commemorate the occasion by holding quinceañera – a grand party marking her transition to adulthood similar to a "sweet sixteen."

But Anna's quinceañera is not just a one-time celebration; rather, monthly. Since turning 15 on August 30, all six restaurant Boston-area locations have

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offered "complimentary treats" – from chips and salsa to authentic Mexican coffee -- on the 15th day of each month and will continue to do so through July.

Extensive celebrations are nothing new to the locally-fathered chain. In fact, Anna's began with a large, spontaneous bash.

Kamio recalled Anna's August 30, 1995 birth at the Beacon Street, Brookline location in a seven-seat space half its current size.

"It was just supposed to be a small party only for the people who worked to build the store, and people outside kept coming to the door, so we started to let them in. The next thing I knew, we has been open and serving people all night."

Since then, Anna's has amassed a locally-large and loyal fan base. The restaurant hosted an engagement party for a couple that met at one of its stores. Over the years, West Coast-style Mexican street food the chain added another Brookline location, two spots in Cambridge, one in Somerville and another in Beacon Hill.

For the last four summers, a customer-invented burrito-appreciation marathon has been held along a 13-mile course that brings participants to all six Anna's locations.

"This totally, everyday, blows me away," said Kamio, referring to Anna's steady growth.

The restaurant has had heavy reliance on word-of-mouth marketing to build the chain's now institutionally-acclaimed status, **amid increasing competition** in Boston's burrito market.

He added that he's most proud of the taqueria's consistency through its decade-and-a-half-long history of operating 363 days each year serving four core items – burritos, tacos, quesadillas, and Mexican plates.

"The food today is just like it was before," said the 54-year-old Japanese-American San Francisco-native.

He said uniformity -- of Anna's food quality, pricing and service -- is a major factor in the chain's success. That uniformity stems from a simplistic, patient approach apparent in the restaurant's rarely changing, tightly-edited menu to the fact that there are only six, closely-held locations.

Kamio said he has received countless requests to open other restaurants and that he could easily have four to five times the number of Anna's operating now.

"Keep it simple, that's the way we can manage it ... I could go to 20 to 30 [locations], but that would likely mean bringing in partners and a different composure to Anna's," he said. "I'm not trying to race Chipotle to number of stores. We're comfortable. We're slow and steady and we're going to stay that way."

He said he receives e-mails daily. Business people ask him about opening a franchise. Former regulars who've since moved elsewhere, contact him wishing an Anna's would open near wherever they've moved to. Kamio said restaurant proposals have come from other American cities including New Orleans, California, Chicago, and Houston, and even internationally from places including Dubai, Hong Kong, Japan and Russia.

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While the chain has left some customers' requests for more taquerias unfulfilled, the restaurant has been soliciting customer stories "about how Anna's has positively impacted your life" for a 15th anniversary, year-long contest that will select a winner later this summer and shower that person and 50 friends with a "burrito party."

"It's important to me that Anna's does well and Anna's customers do well, too," Kamio said.

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(Courtesy: Anna's Taqueria)

Tacos al pastor, a menu item at locally-based Anna's Taqueria.



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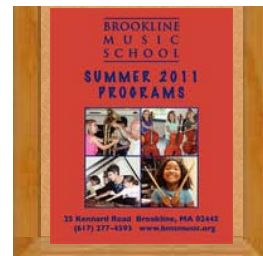
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