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BROADNECK GRILL AND CANTINA

1364 Cape Saint Claire Rd., Annapolis | 410-757-0002 | Broadneckgrill.com

By Rita Calvert

Since Donna Duran, “Cantina Marvel,” keeps up with the times, she thought highlighting one of their specialties from Broadneck Grill and Cantina and Cantina II would inspire folks looking for one of the healthiest options in Mexican food.

How long have you been in business? Give us an overview of the history.

I’ve had the Cape St. Claire restaurant for 23 years. Broadneck Grill and Cantina had been rolling successfully for nearly 18 years when I was approached by a commercial Realtor asking if I had interest in opening a second location of my neighborhood spot further south in Edgewater. After a year of planning and permits, the new location opened in 2014 in a busy strip mall on land that had originally been farmland. The cozy friendliness of the bar and combo dining room has drawn folks from the beginning and they keep coming back. It’s another “Cheers” kind of place.



“THE COZY FRIENDLINESS OF THE BAR AND COMBO DINING ROOM HAS DRAWN FOLKS FROM THE BEGINNING AND THEY KEEP COMING BACK.”

With two fully operating restaurant locations, catering and special events, how many employees do you have, especially being open seven days a week?

I have 100 employees for both locations. That’s a big payday on Fridays! Many of my folks have been with me for many years, some from the beginning!

Tell us about your head chef in each location...do they develop and use the same menu?

Venustiano Bravo is my chef at the Cape location. We have worked together since day one. He is from Puebla Mexico, attributing to our authentic Mexican food. Venus vacations yearly in Puebla and recreates new dishes when he returns. Guillermo Diaz is from Nicaragua and has worked with me for 20 years. I moved him from the Cape to Edgewater, and he has been my chef there since we opened. Both of these men have contributed greatly to the success of the restaurant. They continually give 110 percent every day in the kitchen, for which I am so grateful, and take pride in every dish created.

How would you describe your food?

Our food is Contemporary American and Mexican Cuisine. In the contemporary area, our special of lamb shanks is one of our biggest sellers and of course, we have cream of crab soup as well as crab cakes. My many trips to Mexico, as well—as Venustiano’s trips [provide a] foundation for our Mexican food. I listen to my customers and retain the same menu for both locations given the proven success in the Cape St. Claire tested run. The entire menu is re-evaluated annually where new specials are offered before they find a permanent home on the menu.

You claimed, “Ya gotta keep up with the times!” What changes are you making with your menu to “keep up?”

Many people these days are trying to cut back on simple carbs and gluten so we have created dishes with that in mind, like the recipe below for Zucchini Enchiladas—which is actually a zucchini boat stuffed with a wholesome chicken mixture in red sauce. As an entree we also do a Mexican Spaghetti Squash Bowl, another big hit. A new special salad is offered each month and some other winners are the Steak Salad with Baked Sweet Potato Chips and Blue Cheese, Chicken and Pear Salad, and Quinoa Black Bean Salad.

You make ALL of your desserts from scratch? What kitchen do you use and how can you ever keep up? What is the best seller?

I am definitely a dessert person so we put a special focus on them. My pastry chef, Juan, makes all our desserts, although I come up with the recipes. Our two best sellers are our Strawberry Shortcake and Chocolate Mousse Cake. Yes, we make all our desserts from scratch and we take pride in every one. We make the desserts at both locations.

Do you have a lot of catered events? Tell us about them.

Broadneck Cantina and Cantina II have catered events with as many as 900 guests for weddings, and corporate and private events. The majority of our catered events are off-premise. We also offer wine pairing dinners, civic events, and special fundraisers. I am a member of the Rotary Club and do fundraisers for both communities of my restaurants. I especially like the baseball fundraisers.

Word has it the your Cinco de Mayo events are a big deal! Do you celebrate at both locations?

We go all out at both locations with large tents and additional tables and chairs set up outside, although the celebration is continued in the restaurants, as well. This is a fundraiser for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and all of the money from both raffles goes to them. With Margaritaville-style music and lots of giveaways, we have thousands of people and families that attend. There is no entrance fee, so people buy their choices at the taco bar, beer tent, and margarita station. To plan enough for the crowds, we order 70 cases of tequila for the festivities!

ZUCCHINI ENCHILADAS

Serves 2

These are one of the most popular dishes at the Broadneck Cantinas. Make the ranchero sauce first and keep some on hand as a topping for an array of dishes. The chicken mixture can also be made a day in advance.

RANCHERO SAUCE

2 tablespoons **vegetable oil**
1 cup **sliced onions**
1/2 teaspoon **salt**
1 tablespoon **chopped fresh garlic**
1/2 teaspoon **crushed black pepper**
1/4 teaspoon **ground coriander**
1/2 teaspoon **ground cumin**
1/2 teaspoon **ground oregano**
2 tablespoons **tomato paste**
1 (12-ounce) can **diced tomatoes**
1 (3-ounce) can **diced green chiles**
2 teaspoons **corn starch**
1/2 cup **water**

In a medium skillet, heat the oil over high heat. When hot add the onions and sauté five minutes. Add the remaining ingredients down to and including the green chiles.

In a small bowl, mix the cornstarch and water. Lower pan heat to medium and add cornstarch mixture to sauce. Heat while stirring constantly until slightly thickened.

CHICKEN FILLING

2 tablespoons **vegetable oil**
1 cup **sliced onions**
8 ounces raw **boneless skinless chicken thighs**, trimmed
8 ounces raw **chicken breast tenders**, trimmed
1 tablespoon **chopped garlic**
1 teaspoon **salt**
1/2 teaspoon **dried marjoram**
1 tablespoon **chicken base**
1 small **bay leaf**
1/3 cup **tomato paste**
1 (12-ounce) can **crushed tomatoes**

In a large skillet over medium-high, heat the oil. When hot, add the onions and cook five minutes. Add the dark chicken meat and cook another five minutes. Add the chicken tenders, cover with a lid until just about cooked through. Add garlic, salt, white pepper, marjoram, chicken base, bay leaf, and tomato paste. Stir well, then add crushed tomatoes; cover again with lid. Reduce heat and cook slowly until heated thoroughly.

ZUCCHINI BOATS

2 medium **zucchini**
3/4 cup **shredded Monterey Jack cheese**
Sliced scallions and cilantro leaves, for garnish

Bring a large pot of water to boil. Preheat oven to 400°. Cut zucchini in half lengthwise, and using a small spoon or melon baller, scoop out flesh, leaving ¼-inch thickness.

Drop the zucchini halves in boiling water and cook 1 minute; remove from water. Place zucchini halves cut side up. Using a spoon, fill each hollowed zucchini with 1/3-cup of the hot chicken filling, pressing firmly. Top with ranchero sauce and shredded Monterey Jack cheese and place in oven for 8-10 minutes, until cheese is melted. Serve with Mexican rice and black beans.

As a food writer, blogger, food stylist, Rita Calvert has partnered in writing cookbooks and developed product lines to showcase the inspiration, art and nourishment of food. In the Chesapeake Region, she is a strong advocate of local, sustainable farms.

The
Taste

