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Community & Business News

Santa Fe Café – Offering Healthy Mexican Dining



When you think of Mexican food, what typically comes to mind is chips, salsa, tacos, enchiladas, tostados and a specialty item.....chicken, fish or a beef plate. The last thing you think about is how the meal is cooked and how healthy it is, never mind the calorie count!

For Santa Fe Café co-owners, and sisters, Rosemary Matthews and Jenny Garcia, it's all about preparing healthy dishes. They use only natural ingredients and cook with canola oil and soy bean oil, not lard, which is the norm in most Mexican restaurants.

Tucked away on Louise Avenue where it dead-ends just north of Roscoe Blvd.,

Santa Fe Café recently opened after 15-years of serving residents at their former location in Toluca Lake. With ongoing major road work blocking access to the restaurant, the sisters decided it was time to make a change. Finding a location that already had a liquor license led them to their new home. And while it may be far from Toluca Lake, it hasn't stopped their loyal customers from coming north to Northridge.

Being a Mexican restaurant, I and my lunch partner ordered the obvious... for starters, we ordered chips with salsa and quesadilla, followed by the Pollo Plate and the Enchilada Plate, which we shared.

Served fresh and hot, the chips are not the typical chips you'll find in one of the chain restaurants. There's a definite difference, from texture to taste. Eaten with or without the accompanying salsa, which is homemade on the premises, I could have easily made a meal out of them. Bring me a side of guacamole and I would have been happy to fill up on the chips and call it a day.

Then there was the quesadilla; a large grilled flour tortilla stuffed with melted cheese and served with guacamole, homemade salsa and chips. In a word - *awesome!* My lunch partner described it this way... it's a Mexican version of a grilled cheese sandwich – thick and loaded with cheese –nothing skimpy about them. There are other versions of the quesadilla to choose from, as well.

As hard as it was, we did leave room for the main courses.

The Pollo Plate featured a charbroiled chicken breast that was marinated in fruit juices and seasoned with garlic, kumon, white pepper and salt. Presented on a bed of lettuce with just the right amount of red vinegar and a vinaigrette dressing. Lots of flavors here!

The meal was served with a choice of tortilla's and salad, accompanied with rice and beans cooked vegan style in soy bean oil.

Next was the Enchilada Plate, a corn tortilla stuffed with diced chicken breast and ranchero sauce, served with Mexican rice and black beans, again, made without animal products (other than the chicken). I'd like to get my hands on the recipe for the ranchero sauce... it's among of the best I've had. Both plates had ample portions and were nicely presented.

There's a lot more to Santa Fe Café. In addition to a wide selection of dinner choices, there are plenty of starters, soups and salads, sandwiches, lunch specials, breakfast and a children's menu. And of course, a full bar.

Dinners run from \$8.99 to \$12.50; lunches are \$6.99 and \$7.99.

You can check out the menu at www.thesantafecafe.com . The address is 8319 Louise Avenue in Northridge.