

By Kimberly Hundley

Juan Jaime's Conquers Scottsdale



Restaurant mascot Pedro del Norte swims in a Partida tequila bottle.

FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps of their successful 2½-year run in Chandler, the owners of Juan Jaime's Tacos and Tequila opened a second Valley restaurant in North Scottsdale in January. Within just seven weeks, the new enterprise was outperforming the original locale.



"Juan Jaime" was owner John James' nickname at ASU, where friends teased him about his addiction to Mexican travel.

"The stores are neck and neck," says John James, who founded the concept with partner Adam Dahlberg. "I really thought it would take six months to a year. I didn't expect word to get out this fast."

The current economy is a friend to Juan's, where no food item is more than \$10. Not your typical "Mexican restaurant," Juan Jaime's specialty is the street-style tacos found throughout Mexico, served in a basket with corn or flour tortillas, topped with cilantro and white onion. Diners choose from fillings such as grilled steak, chicken, mahi mahi, pork, shrimp, and black beans with peppers. The two-taco signature dish is \$6.95. Pricing at the Chandler and Scottsdale restaurants is the same.

"We just filled a void," James says—and he could mean that literally. Juan's occupies the 3,000-square-foot space

vacated last year by Pinata's at Hayden Peak Crossing. James happened upon it while meeting a friend for lunch. The gorgeous patio with sunset views and garage-door bar caught his fancy, and a second location was born.

James says patrons enjoy the casual but upscale ambiance of the restaurant, which sports clean lines and earth tones. Food is simple and fresh, with four kinds of salsa mixed fresh daily along with homemade sweet-and-sour mix for the margaritas. As James discovered when he drew up his first business plan, tequila is the life's blood of a Mexican restaurant selling "cheap eats." More than 80 types of tequila are on the menu, attractively priced to drive profits.

Juan Jaime's Tacos and Tequila

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Night Owls

In Chandler, late nights have proved a windfall for the restaurant, which attracts nearby hospitality workers who need a place to go after clock out. James is trying the same thing in Scottsdale, serving a

full menu until 1 a.m. He's committed to religiously staying open for at least six months to build a following. "Clearly people are out at that hour because I watch them drive through the Jack

in the Box across the parking lot all night," James says, laughing.

An extended happy hour is another Juan Jaime specialty. Between 4 p.m.

and 8 p.m., daily specials include \$3 house margaritas, \$3 imported beers and \$2.50 Tecate.

The first Juan's was launched in July 2007. "I would have never opened a restaurant if I'd had a crystal ball and known the economy would be in the toilet for so long," James says. "I don't think you can get rich off one restaurant; you can only charge so much and people stop coming." Franchising may be a possibility down the line. In the meantime, James plans a third locale in Gilbert within the next couple years. ■



The dining room fills with happy hour patrons enjoying \$3 house margaritas.