

La Borinqueña

MEX-ICATESSEN



Rosa Lopez Velasquez

From Mama Rosa's Kitchen To Yours

Some people keep time by the seasons. Others, by presidential terms. For Tina "Tamale" Ramos, history is measured with food and family. Six days a week, Monday through Saturday, Tina manages Mexican restaurant La Borinqueña, one of Oakland's oldest family-owned businesses.

Composed of a grocery, bakery, and restaurant, the shop sits on 7th Street in downtown Oakland, between Jefferson and Clay Streets. Now run by the boisterous, third-youngest daughter of Antonio and Natividad Ramos, La Borinqueña's history is indelibly tied to the neighborhood it's called home for seven decades.

La Borinqueña got its start in July of 1944 when Rosa Lopez Velasquez, originally from Jalisco, Mexico, opened her small grocery store. Rosa's business was founded on providing the finest Mexican products and ingredients. Using borrowed money from her neighbors to stock the cash register, she set up shop at 5th Street and Brush in West Oakland. A few years later, the store moved to a building at 687 7th Street, where Rosa added prepared food to her shelves.

Here Rosa and her family spent the next 25 years, serving and making friends with their neighbors. But change was on its way. Rosa's daughter Natividad, who had been working at La Borinqueña since she was 12 years old, purchased the restaurant with her husband Antonio in 1958. Then in the late 1960s, the City of Oakland announced plans for a new freeway overpass. La Borinqueña was in its direct path of construction. Thus, another move, this time to 582 7th

Street.

Since 1971, this is where La Borinqueña has remained. Natividad, now 77, still works on Saturdays to meet with her beloved customers, though she passed management responsibilities to her daughters Tina and Isabel in 1997. Isabel's daughter Renee ushered in the fourth generation of family members who've worked at the shop when she became employed at La Borinqueña in 2006.

Over the last 11 years, Tina has sharpened her vision of the future for La Borinqueña. "I'm starting to see what my mother talked about: the importance of small businesses and the beauty of Oakland's diversity," she explained.

With this realization came a new passion for Tina, who has become involved with Old Oakland Neighbors and the Oakland Merchants' Leadership Forum. By serving the best Mexican food in town, keeping in touch with her customers, and staying involved in local business outreach, Tina hopes to contribute to the new Oakland she sees developing. "I could be doing something else," Tina says. "But my love for Oakland and the community keep me here." So keep your chin up Oakland. You've got Tina Tamale and La Borinqueña in — and on — your corner.

For More Information

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