



Villa Manila: A Success Story of Perseverance & Filipino Pride

By Al Villamora based on interview by Marybeth Bautista • Rev. article - 04/10/08

Nancy Mendoza, the owner of Villa Manila, is a restaurateur endowed with a lot of business sense and is driven by her passion for authentic Philippine cuisine. Such passion is mutually shared by her children: Ria who runs the business when mom is away, and son Joe who works as a part-time chef when not working at Torrey Pines Hilton.

Villa Manila is located in the "Little Manila Shopping Center" more popularly known as the "Old Schoolhouse Square," at 500 E. 8th Street, National City.

Although the success story of Villa Manila began four years ago, its genesis can be traced to the famous and highly successful Max Restaurant – a Manila landmark widely recognized as one of the best restaurants in the homeland for its chicken and lumpia ubod (heart of palm) specialties, and continues to earn national recognition for its pioneering spirit and highly praised food.

The majority of Villa Manila's customers are Filipinos coming from the nearby Naval Bases and myriad businesses within a mile radius. Only a small percentage of mainstream customers patronize the establishment. Nancy shares her son's dream of expanding the mainstream customer base.

"I think we can do it," says Nancy. "I know that the competition is tight particularly with so many competing fast foods, [but] with added specialties, healthy choices and proper exposure

She is very much involved with healthy eating and has joined Kalusugan Community Services' (KCS) "Healthy Eating Campaign" (HEC) as an advocate. To prove her sincerity to the campaign and to dispel a common stereotype that Filipino foods are unhealthy, she has allowed KCS to analyze some of her traditional recipes (e.g., chicken tinola) to show their healthy contents.

"We want the community to know that Filipino food does not have to be greasy," Joe said. "At Villa Manila, we are able to modify and/or substitute menu items to suit the customer's needs.

"We're a sit-down restaurant, not a fast food one," added Ria, "although we welcome take-out orders. We provide courteous service and ...serve our customers with pride." Uwej "uvcvg o gpvu"tgEgeV"vjg"tgucwctcpvuu" o qvkh"qh" simple décor. Other than a few Philippine paint-kpiu"cpf" yqqfpg" rctswg"Eqqt."Xkmc" Ocpknciu" décor is minimal.

"People should not have to pay for opulent decorations. They come here for our quality and healthy food and pay a reasonable

price – this is our focus," explained Nancy.

The population and demographics of the Old Schoolhouse Square have remained steady for the last 10 years and local businesses are increasing. As a matter of fact, another Filipino fast food restaurant just opened up in the Square.

However, the idea of a health consciousness through nutritional awareness and dietary change has been slowly building for the last 7 years in mainstream America and could soon make headway in the Asian communities.

The extensive government studies and new Food Guide Pyramid have given everyone a pg y" fg ĩpkvkqp"qh" c" dncpegf. "j gcnvj {" "fkgv" V jku" is not a fad but a true dietary trend backed by the uekpvk ĩe" cpf" o gfkccn" eqo o wpkv {" "vjg" o gfkccn" the government, and endorsed by the big food manufacturers. This trend will be even more important by the turn of the century.

"Tuloy Po Kayo! VILLA MANILA opens its doors to you, our valued patrons, that you may experience the pleasure and delight of Hknkrkpq" jqukvcnkv {" "cpf" ĩpg"ewkukpg.-" yknn" i tggv" one while navigating through the online menu. Villa Manila offers a menu listing the "best of the Philippine islands and the most common favorites." According to the website, the restaurant serves "the best with emphasis on fresh produce, quality meats and imported authentic herbs, spices and condiments from the Philippines."

"Traditional cooking styles and techniques so typical of Filipino hometown cooking is the way we prepare our dishes," says Nancy. "However, we have adjusted and adapted to the Western appetite as well. We will delight you with a plateful of mouth-watering goodies,"

For many people, restaurant dining is no longer reserved for special occasions. It is a daily event. In fact from experience, our families spend nearly half of all our food dollars on food eaten away from home. That food is one-third of all calories in the average American as well as the Filipino diet.

With the current unhealthy trend of obesity among many Filipinos, Villa Manila currently leads Filipino South Bay restaurants



Nancy Mendoza, proprietor, and daughter Ria.

that provide menu options that are intrinsically healthful -- low in fat and cholesterol. Customers need to have dining alternatives available to help them maintain a healthful lifestyle, if they so choose.

After four years in business, Villa Manila continues to celebrate its distinctive cuisine, its eqnqthwn" jkuvqt {" "cpf" "vjg" vtcpuhqt okpi "kpEwgpeg" it has had on the culinary palate of San Diego. -- (This news story was written and contributed by Al Villamora based on Marybeth Bautista's interviews of the Mendozas).



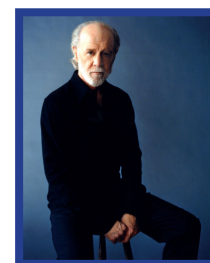
Come & attend our
Heart-Healthy Tasting Event on
May 3, from 5pm to 7pm

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FAMOUS QUOTES BY FAMOUS PEOPLE

"There's no present. There's only the immediate future and the recent past."



George Carlin (1937-present)

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