

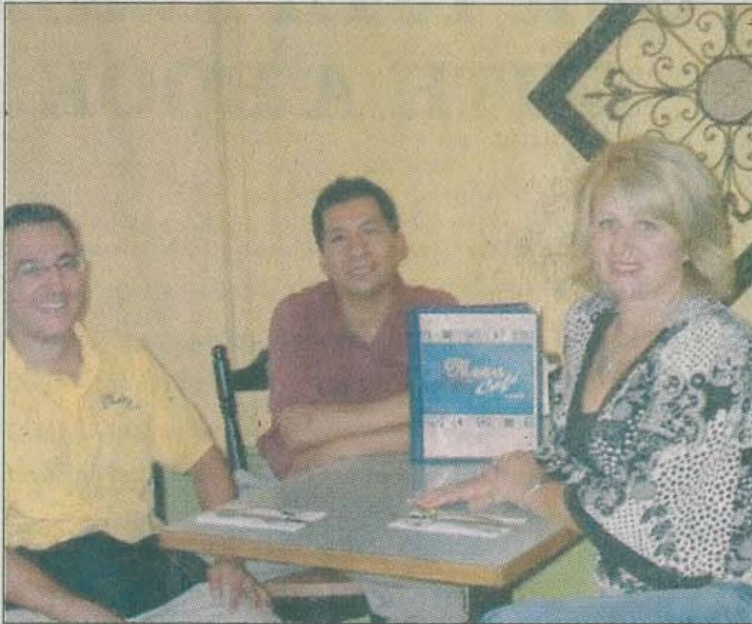
# From Station to Mesa: A café makeover

By MERI R. KENNEDY

What do you do when you own and operate a classic American diner located in the downtown district of Cranston and want to transform it into a Mexican style café on a limited budget? That was the challenge, concern and problem of Ismael Loeza, owner, and Carlos Neves, manager, of the former Rolfe Street Station Restaurant, which will celebrate its grand opening to the public at 5:30 p.m. this Thursday, Oct. 11.

The answer was no further than the person sitting at one of their tables enjoying a breakfast at the restaurant. Michelle Lee Parenteau, owner of Michelle Lee Designs (also in Cranston), an interior design business, overheard Ismael's and Carlos' interior

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Pictured above are (left to right) café manager Carlos Neves, café owner Ismael Loeza and Michelle Lee Parenteau of Michelle Lee Designs, interior designer of Mesa Café. (Submitted photo)

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or and exterior challenges and offered her thoughts. They listened and liked what they heard and decided that Michelle had the solution.

The answer was an "extreme makeover" similar to the popular television reality shows. Parenteau would create interior and exterior designs, find the materials, supplies and paint, while Ismael and Carlos did the majority of the work. Together, they brought the taste and flavor of the Southwest to Rolfe Street.

"There were two main challenges to overcome in transforming the restaurant into one that would have a Mexican atmosphere. The first challenge was a limited budget," explained Parenteau. "Like most small businesses, any additional expenses can affect the short term operation and success of the restaurant. It was imperative that we stay within or under budget."

The second challenge was timing once the design had been created and approved.

"Since the restaurant was open early for breakfast and served lunch, all work had to be done in the evening," said Parenteau.

The restaurant was going to become a café. That meant more than a renovation, with new décor for the two dining rooms. It also meant a new name. The new name, which Michelle suggested, became the Mesa Café and Grill to promote the new atmosphere and the added Mexican-styled menu items.

"I got my inspiration from eclectic plates that Ismael and Carlos purchased," said Parenteau. "I then pulled a color palette together and suggested a bright yellow color for the main dining area that was uplifting. To accent the yellow walls, I mixed in a variety of wrought-iron accessories and bright colored tiles. Another concern was lighting. We changed the existing lighting to pendants and

wall sconces to provide an atmosphere and ambiance that reflected the new and desired look of the café. The new design included a light wood laminate floor replacing the carpeting."

The inside or second dining room was given a different treatment, which included new terracotta-colored tile with cobalt blue accent tile.

"We also created a blue Moravian star in the center and took down the plastic lighted tubing around the windows," said Parenteau. "We also added a new window treatment design to reflect the new image of the café. Virtually everything in the restaurant had a makeover, including the restrooms and the exterior of the building."

Even the menu is different, said Loeza, again thanks to Parenteau.

Much like the Extreme Makeover television series, the majority of the work in the café was done by Carlos and Ismael, the owners. They replaced the dark maroon carpeting and painted the walls, which were previously gray. They also hung the ornaments and accessories and did a number of other jobs as well to help make sure that the renovation was within its budget.

The project was completed within two weeks and within the budget parameters. Most important, the design became a reality: a Mexican-looking café that offers a warm and inviting ambience.

"We chose Michelle to execute the design for Mesa Café and Grill because of her extensive knowledge in design and working with color," said Neves. "She was energetic and enthusiastic about bringing our vision to life. And, she was a customer of the restaurant and therefore knew what we had to do to make our vision come true."

The Mesa Café and Grill, located at 100 Rolfe St., is open daily from 7 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and Friday evenings until 8 p.m. The public is welcome to join in the grand opening festivities this Thursday evening.