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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Captain Poncho's Food Truck Opens Restaurant in Southern Village

Carolina Escobar is extroverted, entrepreneurial and very excited about her new restaurant in Chapel Hill's Southern Village.

She brought her Captain Poncho's taco truck to the Southern Village Food Truck Rodeo in June of 2014. Fifteen months later, her bricks-and-mortar Captain Poncho's restaurant opened at 708 Market Street.

"Having a restaurant was my dream," she said. "Chapel Hill picked me."

Carolina is the fourth to make this truck-to-tables break-through in Chapel Hill-Carrboro. Others include Bandido's, Mixed and Olio & Aceto.

The owner-management team in Southern Village wanted to add a Mexican restaurant to their other dining options: Town Hall Grill sports bar, Pazzo Trattoria and Pizzeria, Rasa Malaysia and the Weaver Street Market hot bar and salad bar. For several months, Dixon Pitt, a 25-year-old property manager, worked closely with Carolina on design, equipment purchase and construction costs, striving to make the restaurant a reality.

"We were committed to being a good partner. The process wasn't easy and it wasn't fast, but it was a great experience, and we are thrilled to have Captain Poncho's serving Carolina's great food every day," Pitt said.

At Captain Poncho's, Carolina cooks, serves, supervises, rings up orders and visits with her customers. She urges people to try unfamiliar dishes, such as fried plantain or fried yucca with "special sauce". Or the weekend soups, Mexican posole and Mole de Olla. "It is traditional to serve the posole on weekends in Mexico," she said of the pork, hominy and guajillo pepper soup. The Mole de Olla is a hearty beef soup with corn, zucchini, chayote and guajillo.

Carolina's dishes are simple and fresh -- nothing greasy, no blankets of melted cheese -- but the menu offers impressive variety. The current best seller is her Loco Burrito, a delicious combination of chipotle, rice, beans, sour cream, tomato, avocado and meat or chicken. For heat-lovers, she prepares the Diablo Burrito, spiced up with habaneros, mango and guacamole.

The tacos themselves, both corn and flour, are fresh, tender, thin and authentically Mexican. They come with beef, pork, chicken, tongue, salmon or shrimp and house made pico de gallo.

The pork carnitas simmer for hours. Quesadillas, enchiladas, chilaquiles and sopos round out the menu. Her chile relleno is beautiful looking and tasting, wrapped in a delicate crepe. And she makes her own red and tomatillo sauces.

A party tray for 20 people, with taquitos, yucca, plantain, chicken nuggets, vegetables, guacamole, chips and salsa, is a bargain at \$35.99. And it includes her queso dip, deliciously flavored with shaved onion.

“My food is home cooking, Michoacan style,” she said. She grew up in Morelia, a university city and the capital of Michoacan on Mexico’s west coast. At age 18, she moved to Los Angeles and worked in food trucks. Carolina bounced around: to Salisbury, NC, to work for her uncle, a cook in (of all things) a Chinese restaurant; to Chicago, working with a different uncle; back to California, cooking alongside her brother in the food truck business. Her Captain Poncho’s food truck opened for business in 2009.

Carolina is starting the new year with daily specials: Margarita Monday (a pitcher of Margaritas and nachos for \$20), Taco Tuesday (two tacos, rice and beans for \$5.99), Wednesday two-dollar tacos, and Pina Colada specials on Fridays.

For Valentine’s Day, Captain Poncho’s is offering a special takeout dinner: ribs, salmon or chicken with tequila sauce, with accompanying vegetables and sides.

She will prepare a whole family meal for takeout, or cater functions and parties.

Her killer rum cake is very popular and can be bought whole or by the slice. Other desserts include lemon cake, Nutella burrito, flan and capricho, an almond-flavored custard with tres leches (that’s three milks -- milk, condensed milk, evaporated milk).

The capricho is another manifestation of Carolina’s entrepreneurial streak. She has perfected her recipe and its good looks, packaged single servings in neat plastic cups, and added a label stating calories, fat and sugar content. She hopes to sell these through other food stores, such as Weaver Street Market.

Meanwhile, her husband Hector is manning the Captain Poncho’s food truck, whenever he is not in the restaurant helping his talented wife.

Captain Poncho’s is open 11 am to 9 pm daily. 708 Market Street in Southern Village, Chapel Hill, just south of downtown on US Highway 15-501 South. (919)697-2237 or captainponchos.com. Tweet Carolina @captainponchos.