



Nuevo Modern Mexican and Tequila Bar Restaurant

Nuevo means “new”, and new and vibrant aptly describe Akron’s newest downtown eatery. The flavor is new and vibrant – Mexican, with Chef Owner Zack Hirt’s creative interpretation. The décor too is new and vibrant. Like the food, the Mexican roots are evident and blend well with more contemporary features. The dining rooms and seasonal patio are always bustling. It doesn’t hurt that Nuevo boasts the finest selection of tequilas in the area either.

It wasn’t easy transforming a tired and dated sporting goods store into a vibrant restaurant. Zack and his wife Lisa (Owner Operator of Nuevo) were always taking on projects. So when Zack felt like it was time to make a career move, the couple’s project management skills kicked in. Why not open their own restaurant? Zack had the kitchen experience, and Lisa has held positions as a Registered Dietitian and in restaurant management. The next consideration was “What kind of food?” They knew they wanted to open in the downtown area, so they looked at what was needed in the downtown market. Of course, they also looked at the kinds of cuisine they like. The result was Nuevo with its contemporary, upscale Mexican style that opened its doors on February 28, 2014. A study published by the Downtown Akron Partnership later confirmed their choice of cuisine, citing a need for Mexican downtown and reporting that Nuevo had met that need.

Early in their process, they attended workshops presented by Akron’s Small Business Development Center. They met with business advisor Jim Griggy who coached them through the business plan and financial projections. “He helped us organize all of the information we were gathering.” Said Lisa. “We presented our business plan to potential investors even before they tried the food. Many said it was one of the best they had ever seen.”

What advice would they give to others starting a business? Be prepared to work! Zack works about 80 hours a week and didn’t take a day off for the first six months. Lisa spends 30 hours a week working at the restaurant in addition to maintaining full time employment. They also said, “Call Jim!” and have referred others to the SBDC for advice. The Hirts are strong advocates of using the area for everything from contractor and trade services, to professional services, to locally sourced foods. They suggest getting a plan together and talking to others in the industry. A more established restaurant group impressed the importance of projecting and watching daily cash flow. During the build-out phase of the project, Lisa jokes that she became the general contractor. In fact, she personally vetted everyone involved in the process to manage costs, keep things true to the vision, maintain quality of workmanship and keep things moving. The last piece of advice: “Persevere, and believe in yourself!”

At this writing, Nuevo employs 8 line cooks, 2 prep cooks, 6 dish washers, 7 bartenders, 16 servers, 4 bussers and 5 hosts. They are open for lunch and dinner Monday through Friday and dinner on Saturday. What should you try? Zack’s favorite is the Cuban sandwich, and Lisa likes the carnitas. Those may be good starting points, but there are lots of interesting choices! www.nuevomodmex.com