

## Entrepreneurial Spotlight

Las Catrinas Mexican restaurant was founded by Alonzo Hernandez in 2022. Alonzo is one of seven children born to his parents in Mexico. He has two brothers who are also in the United States running Mexican restaurants in small towns. One of his sisters is also here in the United States. Alonzo has been married to Luz Maria for 13 years. They met in Mexico and have three children ages 8 years, 4 years, and 7 months old.

When we talked about how the idea for his business came about, Alonzo told us, “I worked for several years in the restaurant business. I had initially considered renting a space in downtown Ottawa and creating a Mexican market-type store. When that space didn’t work out, we decided to open a family restaurant in Wellsville to fulfill our dream of owning our own business. My driving force to become an entrepreneur stemmed from wanting to get ahead financially and have something that was mine.”

We discussed what he has done over this past year to build his customer base. He told us, “We try to provide the best service and offer a good product to keep our customers coming back. We feel like we’ve been able to do that and have many loyal customers.” As far as marketing goes, Alonzo mentioned he uses many different types of media. He said, “We do a lot of marketing and advertising on social media, and we also utilize the Wellsville Chamber sign at least once each year. We feel that program has helped let people who aren’t necessarily from Wellsville (but are out at Casey’s or Bert’s for gas or snacks) know that we are downtown.”

As you may or may not know, the Mexican culture reflects hard-working, family-oriented people. Mexican families can be large, and they love to gather to eat as they celebrate holidays and their lives. Part of the culture also includes bright colors, lively music, and dancing. Another piece of Mexican culture behind the name of this restaurant is the Day of the Dead. This holiday is celebrated on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November each year. The Day of the Dead is probably one of the most relevant nationally and one of the most recognized worldwide.

In this celebration, elements of the pre-Columbian beliefs, of the Mayan and Aztec cultures, and of the Christian beliefs, incorporated by the Spaniards during the colony, are combined. The celebration of the Day of the Dead dates from pre-Columbian times and has its origin in the Aztec celebrations in honor of the “lady of death” and the deceased ancestors. In our day, this lady of death is known as Catrina. Alonzo tells us, “We wanted to incorporate as many aspects as possible of our culture into our restaurant. We want the culture to reflect the product that we sell.

We learned that La Catrina is an image depicting a skull created by lithographer José Guadalupe Posada in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1948, the skull was taken up by Diego Rivera, who painted it on the mural, “A Sunday afternoon dream in the Alameda Central.” Also, Rivera

gave a new name to this figure: the Catrina (or La Catrina). Thanks to this mural, La Catrina was transformed into an iconic image of Mexico. Today, it is the symbol of the Day of the Dead. Alonzo reached out to the Wellsville Chamber to help him locate an artist to paint a mural from the movie Coco onto the wall of the restaurant. We were happy to help him locate some local talent to bring this colorful artwork to life!

When asked how being an entrepreneur and restaurant owner affects his family life, Alonzo mentioned, "Having a business requires a LOT of time. Sometimes we must work seven days a week. A lot of time is lost with my family. But my wife works here with me. And you have probably seen my 4-year-old daughter here, too. She would rather be at the restaurant than at home with nothing to do. We try to take time off here and there to spend time together as a family, whether it's local or going away for a few days." Many of Alonzo's family works alongside him at Las Catrinas.

Then we moved our conversation to what motivates him. He said, "Continuing to generate jobs and seeing our customers happy with what we are offering and them returning to see us." As a smart entrepreneur, Alonzo tells us that one way he generates new ideas is by listening to his customers. "The customers tell me what they like, and then I put it to the test," Hernandez says. He recently reached out to the Wellsville Chamber to help him find an English teacher. As a forward-thinking entrepreneur, Alonzo recognized the need for his employees to learn more English. We have located a Spanish teacher for him, introduced her, and they have a plan for a summer class.

As with any entrepreneur, fear can be a huge aspect of being a business owner. For Alonzo, he tells us, "My biggest fear is that the business will not work out. But at the same time, it's that fear that drives me to work even harder, so that never happens." We moved the conversation onto how Alonzo defines success. With that, he tells us, "Success to me is being the best person I can be and treating my employees and customers with kindness and respect."

It's important to find satisfaction in your work, to find the motivation to continue operating a business as difficult as running a restaurant. It's also important that we, as customers and patrons of our local businesses, be sure to show our appreciation. When we asked Alonzo about his most satisfying aspect of his business is, he replied, "It feels really great when customers come up to thank me or my employees for all the good, we are doing in the community and that our food is the best!"

We talked about what Hernandez would tell someone wanting to be an entrepreneur in the restaurant industry. He admitted, "They need to know they need work hard, maybe 7 days a week for 10-12 hours a day to get their business established. It can be very tiring, but it's worth it in the long run!" When we asked what his top three skills were to be a successful entrepreneur,

Alonzo said, "First, you need to be a dedicated person and do something you enjoy. Secondly, you must be willing to dedicate lots of time to ensuring your business will be successful. Lastly, don't EVER GIVE UP!"

When we mentioned "tricks of the trade," and asked Alonzo which ones helped him to stay focused and productive every day, he told us, "Be sure to hire employees who have other skills than your own who can help in areas you aren't the best at. You can't do everything by yourself." And when we inquired about what key activities, he'd recommend entrepreneurs invest their time in, he mentioned, "Continue learning about your business and industry. Always stay up to date on the newest trends and processes."

To wrap up our time together, we asked Hernandez who has been his greatest inspiration on his entrepreneurial journey. To this question, he replied, "All the people I've seen who had nothing to begin with when they began their business, worked hard, and become successful." We told him how glad we are that Las Catrinas chose Wellsville, Kansas to be their home. Alonzo and his family live in our town, and his oldest child attends school here. He feels he and his family have been welcomed with open arms and love the people in our little town.

If you'd like to learn more about Alonzo Hernandez or Las Catrinas Mexican restaurant, you can visit their website at <http://orderlascatrinasmexicanrestaurantandcantina.com/>, call 785-883-2496 or stop by at 520 Main Street in Wellsville. Las Catrinas is open seven days each week from 11AM-10PM.

