

A 'one-of-a-kind man': 'Taco Joe' Morales dies Thursday, remembered with love, appreciation by his family

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
January 7 2017 8:02 AM

ALTON - Joe Morales, known in a more formal fashion as **Jose' Peter Morales**, died at age 75 Thursday afternoon.



Joe's son, also named Jose but with a different middle name, described his father as a "one-of-a-kind man."

"My dad would do anything for anybody," the younger Joe Morales said. "He was

caring, which was great. He cared more about others than he did himself. He will always be Taco Joe to a lot of people because of his love of tacos.”

The elder Joe Morales was known as “Taco Joe” around town and was a founding member of the Los Tres Amigos franchise. Long before his Tres Amigos entered the scene, Joe could be found out with his taco wagon, all over Alton selling tacos and making friends. The trailer was called “Morales Tacos.”

Los Tres Amigos now has locations in Edwardsville, Jerseyville and Wood River.

Food trucks are a big thing today, but Joe Morales was a front-runner in distributing food that way first with his taco wagon, then van, **Alton Township Supervisor /historian Don Huber** said.

“It was probably 30 years ago when Joe started with his taco wagon,” Huber said. “He was pretty intuitive about the future of summer food distribution. It was quite a while before he opened his restaurants. Later in life he also started a plumbing business with the boys.

“The thing I will always remember about Joe is he always had a smile on his face,” Huber said. “He was one of those people you were glad you ran into and was a real positive person to be around. He was always happy to see you.”

Huber said Morales’ taco wagon was legendary as was how he acquired the nickname ‘Taco Joe.’

“Everybody loved his tacos,” Huber said. “They sure were good. If the word was out that Joe was sitting at Schnucks or wherever he might be you could count on people getting out there pretty quick and making trips to see him.”

His daughter, **Urvana**, said her dad was always the lead person on the wagon and van because of how much people loved him and his tacos.

“My dad would help anybody out who needed help,” she said. “When the Alton Renegades’ equipment was stolen, he helped the Renegades in raising money for their equipment. He helped a woman who was homeless with five kids from Texas move here and got her a house and helped her get her feet on the ground. He was always helping somebody. Every year the restaurant helped raise funds for the American Cancer Society with a fundraiser.”

“He loved the tacos and the people,” Urvana said. “He was a good salesman and could talk to anybody. He loved Alton. He started a softball league here and used to have tournaments at one time in Alton. He loved to pitch in softball. He couldn’t run, but he called his pitch the mystery pitch because you never knew where it was going. He also received the Alton Achievement Award from Rick Faccin, Madison County Auditor, something he was very proud of.”

Joe Morales was a Vietnam War combat veteran. Urvana said he never talked about combat, only the good things about being in Vietnam.

Urvana said her father was and always will be her best friend.

“He always did everything for me,” she said. “Until today, I returned it and took care of him. He helped me through divorce. He was a very religious person. He went to St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church. He used to go to the chapel every day before he lost a leg. He died of a heart attack but he went through amputations in October and November and we thought he was through it. He just stopped breathing on Thursday.”

Urvana said her dad was just a lovable guy who never met a stranger.

“My dad was and always will be my best friend,” Urvana said.