

December Small Business Award Spotlights East Alton Restaurant

by Debbie Hagen

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GODFREY – Mr. Pancho's Mexican Restaurant and Grill has been selected as the December 2022 RiverBend Growth Association Small Business of the Month award recipient.

At 119 Eastgate Plaza in East Alton, one of several establishments comprising the city's Eastgate Plaza Shopping Center, Mr. Pancho's is owned by David and Luz Sanchez.

The Sanchezes have been in the service industry and restaurant ownership for over 20 years. They have spent the last three of those years at Eastgate Plaza, offering a full

dining menu full of traditional Mexican dishes made from authentic recipes along with a wide variety of beverage options.

Thousands of diners have come to love as much as the Sanchezes love the people who have dined with them. “We all agree that our goal is to provide a safe, accepting, and an all-around good place to eat and drink,” said restaurant spokesperson Taylor Whitehead. “We also jump at the opportunity to help and give back at any chance possible.”

“All of our food is made from fresh meats and veggies,” Whitehead added. “The recipes are personal and original, and we excel in a good margarita.”

Once serving customers from a smaller and more subdued location, Mr. Pancho’s has been able to add more dining space with its patio and party room at its location now in the plaza. “Opening the back patio and party room opened us up to the opportunity of offering a more comfortable seating arrangement and faster service,” Whitehead noted.

Some of the more challenging hurdles the Sanchezes have faced came with the COVID pandemic. “Working through staff turnovers, as restaurants often do, when the pandemic hit and public dining became nearly extinct, many of our kitchen and front-end employees ended up out of work,” said Whitehead. “When we reopened, we basically had to start over. COVID was hard, but we came back stronger and ready to serve.”

With its 13-member staff, Mr. Pancho’s has also supported many fundraisers over the years, with monetary and gift card donations, and still does so today. During COVID, the restaurant also provided free or reduced-price meals to healthcare workers, children, and many others. “We simply love to give back!” Whitehead exclaimed.

Regular dining hours are Sundays through Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., staying open an hour longer on Friday and Saturday nights until 10 p.m.

Mr. Pancho’s Restaurant and Grill is ready to host events or gatherings as well. The restaurant invites anyone who has an event coming up to consider their location and menu as an option and choice.

The Sanchezes and their team are gearing up now to host their own holiday gathering, and everyone is invited.

Mr. Pancho’s will host a community Christmas Party from 6 to 8 p.m. on Dec. 16, 2022. Santa Claus will be on hand “with Mariachi in the house!” said Whitehead.

The Dec. 16 festivities also include an Ugly Sweater Contest, divided by age groups Toddler 0-4 years, Primary 5-12 years, Young Adults 13-21 years, Topsy Elves 21-plus,

and Senior Panchos 65-plus. Another category of ugly sweaters, from the Employee Group, will be judged by those in attendance.

To learn more about Mr. Pancho's Restaurant and Grill in East Alton at Eastgate Plaza, follow them on [Facebook](#) at @mrpanchosmexicanrestaurantandgrill or call (618) 216-3444.

The RiverBend Growth Association is the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development organization for the 11 communities known as the Riverbend. For more information about the Growth Association, visit www.growthassociation.com or call (618) 467-2280.

RBGA's Small Business of the Month Committee recognizes a different member business each month for its outstanding efforts and leadership in the community. Committee members include Brenda Eardley, Adrianna Lock, Amy Roady, Kristen Ryrie, Martha Schultz, and Amy Smith.

To learn more about membership in the RiverBend Growth Association and the Small Business of the Month recognition, visit the RBGA website or call their Godfrey office.