

By Emily Cicio, Emma Kristoffy and Vanessa Lopez

United in Troubled Times

Through the trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mexican communities across Western Massachusetts are trying to ensure that their fellow neighbors can stay in business and provide for their families. With many Mexican restaurants in Western Massachusetts trying to swiftly transition to take-out and delivery only, Galo Lopez, owner of Coyote Flaco in Williamstown, has been dealing with the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on his business.

Lopez said Coyote Flaco has been open for business for fourteen years and been a popular destination for locals and tourists alike. This family style restaurant has been able to keep its door open not only due to its busy location for tourism, but the authentic Mexican cuisine.

The most lucrative weekend of the year for the business is college graduation weekend, and bookings begin to fill months in advance. Unfortunately, this season will be massively different due to the decision of Williamstown Theatre Festival canceling its onstage productions.

“This means that we will not have a very busy summer, but we are lucky to have such supportive customers and a great community who wants to help,” Lopez said.

For many Mexican restaurants, the busy season begins in May with the beginning of summer tourists. Tourists come from all areas for the Williamstown Theatre Festival, MASS MoCA, and the Clark. The busy season continues into the fall with the change of leaves and the start of a new academic year for the local colleges, including Williams College and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). While the winter season is a difficult time for all restaurants, the local community and ski community keep Coyote Flaco busy most weekends.

Lopez said while the restaurant is experiencing a massive loss, Coyote Flaco has a strong base of local customers that have continued to support them during this pandemic.

Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak, businesses are facing hard times. Many businesses have had to make the tough decision to close their doors and turn away customers that help to keep them financially stable.

Coyote Flaco has decided to follow suit and take a step back from their business as the pandemic worsens.

“We closed because we wanted to keep safe, not only our community but our staff. This was a hard decision we all made together,” Lopez said.

This closure has only shown them how strong their customer base is, and how powerful their community has become during the crisis. Not only have customers shown their loyalty by promising to come back frequently when things clear up, they have also come together to raise money for Coyote Flaco and other restaurants in the North Berkshire area.

Volunteers have created North Berkshire Tip Jar, which provides restaurants with the financial support needed to pay their employees and keep their restaurants surviving in these trying times. Through GoFund me the fundraiser has collected close to \$34,000 dollars to take care of these businesses.

Restaurants are an important way for Latinos to share their culture, heritage and traditions. The U.S. Census Bureau lists Massachusetts’ population at roughly 6.9 million people with the Mexican population making up about 38,000 residents. In Springfield, where the population is about 155,000 residents, about 67,000 or nearly half identify as Hispanic or Latino, according to Data USA.

Many Mexican restaurants born in Springfield have become chains in and out of Western Massachusetts. With the Hispanic and Latino population spread in towns and cities across the state, Mexican restaurants like Coyote Flaco can make a significant impact in their communities and owners like Lopez are ready to re-open their doors and continue to share their cultural through food.