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Editorial notebook: Tex Mex rides again downtown

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Texas Mexican Restaurant is back in business. It reopened this week at the downtown Sacramento location just off K Street where it was evicted more than a year ago.

"I never thought I'd see this," owner Griselda Barajas said. She choked back tears as she welcomed the crowd gathered on the sidewalk in front of her refurbished restaurant.

She was seven months pregnant when Tex Mex was forced to close. She was too tired to fight the city that wanted her out so it could proceed with downtown redevelopment.

Now, seven months pregnant with a second child and holding daughter Grace in her arms, a much more determined Griselda Barajas has returned.

Her new Tex Mex is a little spiffier. A flat screen TV adorns one wall. The color scheme, mustard gold and turquoise, is a tad more sophisticated.

But the food – good, homemade Mexican, perfected in the kitchen of Rosa Barajas, Griselda's mother – is the same. And Rosa still oversees the kitchen.

By returning, Griselda has taken a risk. Her landlord, Mo Mohanna, remains embroiled in a bitter fight with the city. Sacramento has threatened to take his K Street property, including the Tex Mex building, through eminent domain.

"They're bickering over millions," Griselda's husband, Mike Keolanui, told me in disgust, "I did all this for \$85,000. ... We just want our fair shot."

I'm betting they'll get it. Barajas won't be dislodged easily a second time. She's learned a lot – including that she has friends in high places.

Sacramento Assemblyman Dave Jones spoke at the Tex Mex reopening.

So did the heads of the city's Hispanic and Asian chambers of commerce.

Bill Camp, executive secretary of the Central Labor Council, brought union workers out in force, underscoring Tex Mex's distinction as the only union restaurant still in business downtown.

City Councilman Rob Fong came, too. Asked whether Tex Mex would be allowed to remain, Fong said, "I'm sure that the city can work things out."

Councilman Kevin McCarty was even more emphatic. "They're here to stay," he insisted.

Good. Tex Mex deserves its fair shot. The Barajas family has earned it.

– Ginger Rutland

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