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## Editorial notebook: A small K Street restaurant goes under, leaving a void and a bitter owner

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*Published 12:00 am PDT Sunday, September 9, 2007*

Before McCormick & Schmick's, the upscale Portland seafood chain, opened its new eatery in the elegant Elks building on J Street in downtown Sacramento, it received \$1.8 million from the city of Sacramento to help with remodeling. Half came in the form of a grant; half was a loan.

In sharp and depressing contrast, Griselda Barajas, former owner of the now closed Texas Mexican Restaurant, received \$60,000 in moving expenses from the city's redevelopment agency -- and the bum's rush.

Tex Mex closed one year ago last month. At the time, I lamented in these columns its departure from the downtown dining scene -- a family restaurant that served good food at reasonable prices, popular with everyone, sacrificed to downtown redevelopment.

The city of Sacramento's redevelopment agency informed Tex Mex owners they would have to leave or face legal action. Worried she would lose the \$60,000 in moving funds that the city offered, owner Griselda Barajas took the money and closed. One of the few bright lights on the most blighted blocks downtown went out.

Tex Mex's neon sign is still there. The mural depicting a Mexican balcony scene that decorated the façade has begun to chip and fade. The building itself on the back end of K Street remains vacant. Redevelopment plans have stalled downtown again, as the dispute between the city and downtown property owner Moe Mohanna, Barajas' former landlord, drags on. The 700 and 800 blocks of K Street are more blighted than ever.

Watching from afar, Barajas regrets now that she took the city's offer and moved. Norma Barajas, her sister and partner, has had to leave the business because a second restaurant the family operates in the Capitol basement does not generate enough revenue. In an e-mail to Mohanna offering him her support in his fight, Griselda Barajas lashed out at the city.

"I was pregnant with my first child and did not want to stress myself out so I pretty much laid down and put my arms up to surrender to their demands.

"But what is the price of losing your business? For losing in many ways your identity and the perception that we closed down because we went 'out of business.' I knew in my heart that it was a slap in my face to settle for what they gave me. It barely paid off the original investors and taxes, and I was left trying to figure out how to make up the money that would continue to be here if all of this had not happened."

City officials say they offered to help relocate Tex Mex but the owners decided to close. The Barajas family tell a different story. They say they wanted to stay downtown, but the rents at the locations the city showed them were two to three times what they had been paying. They couldn't

afford it.

A year ago, just before Tex Mex closed, Norma Barajas complained, "Not one time did the city come to us and say, 'What can we do to keep you here and make this a better place?' "

Certainly, no one offered the owners of Tex Mex what McCormick & Schmick's got -- \$1.8 million -- to remodel their restaurant.

-- Ginger Rutland [grutland@sacbee.com](mailto:grutland@sacbee.com)

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