

Mexican grocery gets second act

By **Eli Sherman** - April 14, 2017 12:32 am



FAMILY AFFAIR: Casa Mexico, a family-owned retail store located on Atwells Avenue in Providence, specializes in Mexican grocery items, tacos, desserts and other items. From left: co-owner Jackie Sanchez, nephew Enrique Sanchez Jr., and Ivan Sanchez, co-owner. / PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

Ivan Sanchez was born in New York City but moved to Rhode Island when he was 12 and started working in his father's specialty grocery store on Atwells Avenue in Providence.

Five years ago, an illness left his father unable to run the business, which eventually closed in 2014. But a year later, after being unable to rent the space, Sanchez reopened the store as Casa Mexico LLC with his wife, Jackie.

"You can buy a taco, shop around, and go home with new recipes and cakes," Sanchez said, describing his store. "We have specialty items and drinks that you just don't find other places, so we get a lot of folks coming in from other parts of the state."

Indeed, the store, at 802 Atwells Ave., is multifaceted. It offers authentic Mexican products, bakery items and has a small taqueria.

"The specialty items are our niche," Sanchez said. "But we have a little bit of everything."

Sanchez said one of the reasons he decided to reopen the store himself is because it was a challenge to get everything in the building up to code. His father, who opened his store in 1988, was grandfathered into old city code laws, which expired when Sanchez took over.

Sanchez decided he wanted to own the property, and eventually made a loan backed in part by the Community Investment Corp., the U.S. Small Business Administration and R.I. Commerce Corp. He started the loan process in January 2016, but didn't end up closing until December.

"It was crazy trying to get a loan through the commercial banks," he said. "You name it, we went through six to seven banks."

And Sanchez is no stranger to business. He owns a complementary company called Sanchez Mexican Food Distributer LLC, which delivers Mexican products to supermarkets and grocery stores, including his own.

"It's funny because [Casa Mexico] is my best customer," he said, laughing.

Sanchez also incorporated his newly purchased building as its own entity, Casa Property LLC, meaning he holds three business licenses with the state.

Sanchez and his wife run the shop, and get some help from Sanchez's brother and nephew.

Where Sanchez's father catered mostly to the Latino-Hispanic community, Sanchez wants to expand his business and clientele to include a more racially diverse group of people. He says he sees that already happening, based on the people he sees coming into the store each day.

"We're reaching out to the younger crowd and everybody else," he said. "It's about letting everyone know that we're open to all types of folks."

Sanchez plans to renovate the space in the next couple years and, if all goes well, he'd like to open a new location, maybe in Boston.

"When I grew up with my dad owning it, back then I had to get up and work every morning," he said, somewhat begrudgingly. "But now I'm eager, and I'm like, 'What's next?' "

OWNERS:Ivan and Jackie Sanchez

TYPE OF BUSINESS:Authentic Mexican grocery, deli and taqueria

LOCATION:802 Atwells Ave., Providence

EMPLOYEES:Four

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 2015

ANNUAL SALES: WND