

# Molcajetes central

Restaurant prides itself on making unique dishes in traditional way

BY PAMELA BIERI

Special to The Indio Sun

When Ignacio Cortes and his brother, Ramon Cortes, opened El Campanario six years ago, they introduced the valley to molcajetes.

The dish is traditionally served in the stone bowl from which it takes its name. A replica of an ancient molcajetes bowl, roughly carved Aztec-style to resemble a pig, is found on the host stand just inside the restaurant entrance.

El Campanario's long, low California ranch-style brick and wood restaurant is painted an unassuming brown with lawn and desert landscaping surrounding it. A tall sign beckons travelers along Indio Boulevard and is even visible to those passing over the Monroe Street bridge.

Inside, the restaurant and bar retain a coffee shop simplicity with booths in shades of plum and cactus green, light beige painted walls, maple paneling and stained glass fixtures hanging above the booths.

Decor is reserved with subtle hints of the authentic Mexican cuisine.

Ignacio Cortes started as a dishwasher in a Palm Springs restaurant when he first came to the desert and attended College of the Desert, where he learned English as a Second Language.

"I found there are so many possibilities here," he said. "You can get a job and go to school. That's what I appreciate about this country."

## The food

**Most unique food on menu:** Molcajetes are served with rancho cheese, nopal asado (prickly pear cactus) with grilled onions, rice and beans and can include beef, chicken and seafood all bathed in El Campanario's flavorful house made salsa. El Campanario serves molcajetes in special ceramic bowls.

The Molcajetes Campanario (\$13.95) is asada beef and half quail; the Ranchero (\$13.95) combines grilled chicken and a pork chop; the Tampico (\$14.95) offers king crab legs, langostinos and scallops; and the Costilla de Res (\$13.95) is a boneless rib eye with red or green sauce.



Ignacio Cortes (right) with loyal customer Jerry Hunt

## at a glance

### El Campanario

**Where:** 44-185 Monroe St.

**Hours:** 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.  
Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.  
Friday-Sunday

**Reservations:** Yes

**Credit cards:** All major cards accepted

**Kid's menu:** No

**Information:** (760) 342-3681

**Other unique dishes:** Two other dishes that Cortes says no one else has duplicated here are their Alambre Campanario and the Huarache Azteca.

■ Alambre Campanario (\$7.95) is a mix of carne asada, chorizo and tongue beef with bell peppers and onion, topped with Monterey Jack cheese served with homemade corn tortillas. The Alambre con Queso (\$7.95) pairs carne asada and bacon.

■ The Huarache Azteca (\$7.95) is a family recipe from Cortes' grandmother. A homemade corn tortilla is topped with beans, carne asada, nopales (cactus salad), cilantro and a choice of red and green salsa.

As a child, Cortes says he would take his mid-day meal, "comida," at his grandmother's house.

"I can still taste her salsa, the nopales and garlic," he said. "Both grandmothers — Guadalupe Hisguerra and Rafaela Cortes



PAMELA BIERI SPECIAL TO THE INDIO SUN

Drivers can see El Campanario's sign from the Monroe Street bridge.

— inspired me in this restaurant."

### Other items worth mentioning:

■ Besides the ancient and authentic family dishes, El Campanario offers chicken, beef and shrimp fajitas (\$11.95 to \$12.95); chicken, beef, cheese or shrimp enchiladas with choice of red, green or mole sauces (\$10.95 to \$12.95) and tacos, burritos and chimichangas (\$7.95 to \$8.95).

■ Also popular are the Parrilladas — or platters — from the grill (\$25.95 to \$33.95) that range from grilled lobster, ranch style shrimp, fish fillet and Rockefeller oysters to grilled filet mignon, pork chops, chicken and salmon sautéed with Dijon mustard.

Daily lunch specials at \$6.99 each day from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. include tacos, salads and chile rellenos.

El Campanario also has a full bar serving beer, wine, margaritas and cocktails.

## CITYNEWS

### Stevie Nicks tickets go on sale today

Singer Stevie Nicks returns to the Coachella Valley for a May 13 concert in the Special Events Center at Fantasy Springs Resort Casino in Indio.

Nicks is best known for songs such as "Go Your Own Way," "Rhiannon," "Landslide," "Stand Back" and others recorded with Fleetwood Mac and on her solo discs.

On her own, she's released six discs, with "Stevie Nicks: In Your Dreams," her 10th solo disc, scheduled for release May 3.

Tickets for Nicks' 8 p.m. concert are priced at \$69, \$89, \$99 and \$109 and go on sale at 10 a.m. today at the casino box office, by phone and online.

Fantasy Springs Resort Casino is at 84-245 Indio Springs Parkway.

Information: (800) 827-2946; fantasyspringsresort.com.

— JUDITH SALKIN

### Heritage Day to feature exhibits

Culture and commerce will come together on March 26 for the annual Heritage Day Festival at the Coachella Valley History Museum.

The museum is partnering with the Indio Chamber of Commerce for the event. It runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is free.

The event will feature cultural heritage exhibits, pioneer arts and crafts demonstrations, youth activities, authentic food and live entertainment. There will also be a business expo to showcase local commerce.

The museum is at 82-616 Miles Ave.

For information, call the chamber office at (760)347-0676 or the museum at (760)342-6651.

— XOCHITL PENA

### Indio High wins financial aid battle

About 44 percent of the eligible high school seniors in the Coachella Valley filled out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid during a competition between Coachella Valley high schools.

The "Battle of the High Schools" competition was launched in January as a way to encourage more Coachella Valley high school students to take this first step in securing federal financial aid.

The competition is part of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership's goal to create a well-educated workforce and bolster the higher education culture in the Coachella Valley.

Indio, Desert Mirage and Cathedral City high schools had the highest participation rates in their school districts and received \$3,000 for the senior class.

La Familia Continuation High school in Thermal was the top alternative school and won \$1,000.

— MICHELLE MITCHELL

### Casino gets new gaming systems

Fantasy Springs Resort Casino is the first in the state to install two multi-player gaming systems by Interblock.

One unit offers 16 players the chance to sit down and try their hand at craps or roulette.

The second console offers seven gaming stations and features an electro-mechanical card generator for Blackjack. It was recently awarded a "most innovative product" at the London ICE Show.

For each mechanized game, guests can choose from a wide range of available languages they want to be displayed on the game screen.

Information: (800) 827-2946

— STAFF REPORTS