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Tara O´Neill

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**Bridgeport restaurant combines pizza, Mexican food**

Rolando Cruz and his wife wanted to give the people of Bridgeport a little taste of Oaxaca, Mexico, while giving them the option to get pizza at the same time. This clash of cultures became a reality several weeks ago when Cruz and his wife opened Oaxaca Pizzeria & Taqueria.

Cruz came to America from Mexico in 1990 in search of a better future. He met his wife and they had three children while he worked in the Bridgeport area for years, in diners and pizzerias. Then he saw an opportunity that would lead Cruz and his wife to open their own restaurant with some family members at 2212 Madison Ave. in Bridgeport, the former home of Crossroads Pizza House.

“I was working here for the old business that used to be here,” Cruz said. “They moved to a bigger location, and with this place empty, I saw a potential in this business. I spoke to the owner and I think he saw potential in me and he liked my working plan that I had at the time.”

It eventually came down to choosing from the location on Madison Avenue, another location on Main Street and one more in Shelton as the home for Oaxaca Pizzeria & Taqueria.

“We decided this was the best place for us and then we started working,” Cruz said.

Since the previous business was a restaurant, Cruz said the foundation for their idea was solid — they just did a little remodeling.

“It’s a pizzeria and a taco shop, both together,” Cruz said. “We came out with that concept for the same situation that we have, that maybe many families have with kids with more than one culture. When we’re about to have dinner, we would like to order something with options of different foods. There aren’t many places where you can order pizza and tacos.”

As Cruz puts it, being able to order to pizza makes the kids happy, and ordering the tacos and Mexican food makes the parents happy. Oaxaca, Mexico, is one of the 31 states in Mexico. It is in the southern part of the country and borders the Pacific Ocean.

“There’s a lot of Oaxaca people around here,” Cruz said. “We want to bring that culture to the public so they can try a little bit of Oaxaca right here in the U.S.A.”

The pizzeria and taco shop has a signature dish, one that is traditional in Oaxaca: tlauyuda. The dish is served on a big, thin tortilla with beans, shredded cabbage, guacamole sauce, tomatoes, red radishes, cilantro and the option of either steak, beef or pork.

Cruz said in order to get the word out about the business before the grand opening he advertised on a local radio station. Oaxaca Pizzeria and Taqueria held a grand opening for friends and family on Oct. 9, with the grand opening for the public the following day.

“So far people are responding,” Cruz said. “People like the food and that’s all that we’re looking for: to make everybody happy.”

Cruz said he and the others who run the business pride themselves in the freshness of their food and the way it is prepared. He expects this to continue as the years go on.

“We prepare everything the same exact way we would if we were eating it ourselves,” Cruz said. “When you make something at home, you prepare it with love, with lots of love. So when someone asks what our secret ingredient for our food is, we say it’s love.”