

Eating Around the Neighborhood: Broncos

Roseanne Sullivan

You can find Bronco's restaurant at the southwest corner of 13th Street and Empire across the street from Backesto Park near the handball courts. The restaurant with its vivid orange walls, red awnings, and its tall sign with a graphic of two spirited horses is easy to spot.



I've been eating off and on at Broncos since I first moved to the Northside neighborhood, and I have almost always loved the food. (I'll note the one exception further down, after I tell you about my favorites.) After my raves in the last issue of this newsletter about how much I enjoyed the goat served at Birrieria Jalisco, people with conservative tastes in food will probably be sure I am very odd in my food preferences when they hear that my favorite thing to order at Broncos is a tongue burrito.

My mother used to routinely cook tongue, but it's one of the few foods that I like that I've never tried to cook myself. At most Mexican restaurants in San Jose you can find tacos and burritos with not only the standard beef or pork cuts that Anglos recognize, but also organ meats, including cabeza (head), tripe (tripas), and tongue (lengua). When I'm in the mood, I usually buy myself a tongue burrito (Burrito de Lengua \$3.89) at Broncos. The tongue is cooked with onions and comes on a large flour tortilla with beans inside. It's tender and slightly chewy in texture.

There's another old-fashioned organ dish on the menu that I haven't tried yet, but if you're an old timer who actually liked liver and onions, you can come and get it here. On the menu it's called Higado Encebollado.

Besides the tongue burrito, another favorite Bronco's dish of mine is the taco with carne asada, marinated grilled steak sliced thin.

If you have only eaten Mexican food prepackaged from a Norteamericano supermarket or from Taco Bell, you need to know that when you order a taco in a real Mexican restaurant, you are not going to automatically be served a hard fried folded shell with hamburger, lettuce, cheese, and tomatoes. To get a taco like the one I just described, you would have to specifically ask for a hard taco (taco dorado) with cheese (queso) and carne molida (ground beef) and for the lettuce and tomato to be added. I originally

discovered the taco difference at fundraisers by church members who sell tacos after some of the Spanish masses at Holy Cross church and at the once-a-year festival that is held during the church's name day feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross. The tacos I bought at my church are made with small warm soft white corn tortillas, with optional lime wedges, chopped cilantro, salsa, and chopped onion on the side for garnishes. And that's exactly what you'll get at Broncos if you order a Taco Regular. You can order the taco regular with one of the organ meats or the carne asada mentioned earlier, or one of the other meat options in the following list. which includes the English descriptions from the menu in parentheses: barbacoa (marinated shredded beef); al pastor (BBQ pork); pollo (chicken); carnitas (pork); and chile verde (marinated pork in tomatillo sauce). The following three options are not translated on the menu, so my translations appear in the parentheses: chorizo (Mexican sausage); tripas (tripe, aka intestines); or chicharrons (pork rinds). You might want to play it safe and get the taco with ground beef.

Try the Mexican taco, you might prefer it. And you won't be much out of pocket if you don't like it. The tacos regulares only cost \$1.35 a piece. With cheese costs 10 cents more.

This next dish I've tried and liked is not for carb-shy diners. Tacos de Papa (also \$1.35) is a hard taco fried with mashed potatoes in the middle. You might want to try it if you are having a rebellious day after too long a stretch eating an Atkins-type regime. They'll give you sour cream, lettuce, and tomatoes with the Tacos de Papa, unless you tell them not to.

Another "it's got to be bad for you" item I recently discovered at Broncos is the Torta de Milanesa (\$3.99). A torta is a sandwich, and Milanesa is thin, seasoned, breaded, fried steak. It's served on a crisp French-style roll with mayonnaise, lettuce, tomato, onion, and jalapeños. Nothing is healthfoody about this dish. But it is

very tasty nonetheless. You can order the Milanese as part of a dinner if you like, which comes with rice and beans like all the other Broncos dinners.

Now, I have to tell you about my one bad experience at Broncos. I ordered the Pescado Frito (fried fish) dinner one Sunday to take out. When I got it home and tasted it, I found the fish was a little watery, with a faint taste of mold. I didn't want to bother bringing it back. It probably was an isolated occurrence, but I probably wouldn't order the fried fish again.

I interviewed Teresa Macias, who with her husband, Hector, has owned the restaurant for five years.



Before they bought it, the place was called Emma's. I remember driving from Milpitas a few times about ten years ago to eat at Emma's because a coworker at Sun Microsystems had emailed an announcement encouraging us to try the new restaurant that his mother had opened. I had never heard of the Northside neighborhood at that point, but when I got here I thought the restaurant on the edge of the neighborhood park was charming.

After they bought Emma's, the Macias painted and redecorated it. They named the restaurant "Broncos" because Hector loves horses, and he owns one that he boards near where the family lives in Alviso. While Hector was putting down new flooring and building shelves, and their three daughters (Jocelyn, Karen, and Brenda, now 7, 8, and 11 years old) were playing, Teresa glued three-dimensional details and glitter onto the framed paintings of Mexican village scenes that now decorate the walls along with some sun sculptures.



The red and orange color scheme from the outside continues inside with a design of the same colors painted on a stripe on the white walls. There are six tables and a long bar with red trim and red padded chairs.



Outside dining is available on a brick patio with two tables with umbrellas. Roses and hibiscus bloom on the patio inside the wrought iron and brick fence. Off street parking is available in the restaurant's lot to the east on Empire.

Readers of the Northside publications and anyone who attends neighborhood happenings may recall that Bronco's is an advertiser in the newsletter and in other northside publications and that the owners contribute food to Northside events. Broncos is also the keeper of the two bocce ball sets that neighborhood residents can borrow to play at the Backesto park bocce courts.

Teresa told me that these days they do a lot of catering for the Mexican Heritage center. They got their foot in that door when Hector catered food there for a Quinceañera (keen-say-NYAY-rah — a big celebration traditionally held for girls when they turn 15). The center's manager said he was looking for a caterer because a lot of people rent the center for weddings, city or school meetings or other events. Teresa told me proudly that when the manager

tasted samples of Bronco's specialties, he said the food was the best he had tried. Teresa said, "We waited for this opportunity for five years."

On Sept. 16^h, they catered the food for the Mexican Independence Day celebration, and on the 24th they prepared appetizers for the Festival del Rebozo. If you're looking for a caterer for one of your parties, Hector or Teresa will be glad to talk to you.

The menu is in Spanish with English subtitles. The people who take your order at the counter speak English well enough to help you even if you don't know a word of Spanish. The menu includes appetizers, breakfast items, tacos and burritos, dinner platters and seafood. Weekends they serve Pozole (a stew with pork, chicken, and hominy, which is dried and reconstituted corn kernels), Menudo (tripe), and Birria de Chivo (goat stew). Besides standard American fountain drinks, they have Mexican specialty drinks called aguas frescas: Horchata, Jamaica, and Tamarindo. They also have fresh carrot (zanahoria), orange (naranja), strawberry (fresa) and banana (platano) juices, plus Chocomilk (chocolate milkshakes). And they serve Mexican and American beers. The two deserts are flan (egg custard with caramelized sugar sauce) and gelatina (gelatin).

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Broncos is located at 498 North 13th Street (408)295.8330.

Hours: 10 am to 10 pm weekdays, from 9 am to 10 pm Saturdays, and from 9 am to 8 pm Sundays.

Eat in or take out.

"Eating around the neighborhood" is a regular review of neighborhood eateries. Contact this reviewer with leads for good places to eat at: roseannesullivan@sbcglobal.net.

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How to Use the Bocce Court

To borrow bocce balls from Broncos, you need to leave your driver's license and a \$20 deposit. Along with the bocce balls, you will be given a key to open the padlock on the bocce court's gate. It is essential to lock the court properly. If the fence is left unlocked or it's locked without making sure that no gap is left for someone to wiggle through, the bocce court can be misused at night, used for sleeping, soiled, or vandalized. Please help keep the bocce courts a pleasant environment for players.

(The bocce court is located on the 15th street side of Backesto park, about 1/4 of the block south of Jackson St. The entrance is set back between the southwest corner of the tennis courts and restrooms.)