

## **Tomatillo's serves up food 'MexChester' style**

Choices of cuisine abound on Cedar and Main streets

David McKay Wilson

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It's 7 p.m. at Tomatillo's on Cedar Street and Dobbs Ferry businessman Marc Hoffmeister sits at the bar, eating dinner and reading the newspaper. He says he eats here, either alone or with his wife, up to four times a week, sampling one of the village's newest eateries.

"It's very fresh food and eating here doesn't break the bank," says Hoffmeister, noting the \$9.95-price for many entries. "My only complaint is that this place is closed on Monday."

For Hoffmeister, as well as several others eating at Tomatillo's this evening, Dobbs Ferry's only Mexican restaurant offers another refreshing alternative to a village known for its variety of downtown eating spots, which line both sides of Cedar and Main streets.

You can eat sushi at Sushi Mike's Japanese Restaurant or Tenbo Cuisine, sample Chinese takeout at Gold Dragon Restaurant, eat Dublin-style fish 'n' chips at James Caird, dine on veal Siciliana at Sam's Italian Restaurant, watch professional sports while eating at Doubleday's or splurge on dessert and cappuccino at CaffeLatte.

Maurice Giliberti, who grew up in Dobbs Ferry and was a busboy at Sam's during high school, bought the restaurant on Main Street 20 years ago.

"It's where I started out and we want to carry on the tradition," says Giliberti, an Irvington resident.

Tomatillo's owner, Dave Starkey, will celebrate his restaurant's first anniversary in February. Starkey, 40, who lives in Tarrytown, left the television news business to follow a dream first hatched during his high school days on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where he worked at the Silver Palate.

Starkey took eight months to transform a former eyeglass shop at 13 Cedar St. into a cozy space that seats up to 30 diners. Starkey serves a menu that specializes in burritos,

soft tortilla wraps holding vegetables or meat and rice and beans, prepared in a style he calls "MexChester." While some Mexi-can restaurants may steam their burritos, Starkey grills his, which he says keeps the meal fresher and makes it more flavorful. He takes pride in his mango salsa, made with chopped mangoes, red onions and cilantro.

Starkey buys much of his produce from the Stone Barns Center in Pocantico Hills, his coffee comes from Tarrytown Coffee Labs and his wide selection of beer comes from micro-breweries across the country, including several on tap. "We try to do everything local, organic and as healthy as possible," says Starkey, who was a producer at CNN, ABC News, MSNBC and Fox News during his journalism career.

The dining experience here is clearly casual. At one table, Ona and Andy Podell, who have lived in Dobbs Ferry for 24 years, say they come to Tomatillo's for its friendly, relaxing atmosphere and its reasonable prices. At the bar, Hastings-on-Hudson attorney and guitarist Ken Tuccillo, who plays here with a saxophone and blues harpist on many Fridays, sips a pint of Sierra Nevada ale.

Up by the front window, Irving-ton residents Phil Striano and his wife, Stacy Reich, dine with their four children, including Brandon, 16 months old, who was making the most of a pile of rice.

Striano eats a burrito stuffed with shrimp, while his son, Christian, mops up the final bites of a big bowl of chili, which he has pepped up with a spicy chile habenero sauce.

Stacy Reich says they often come early on Tuesdays, when the family can gather for a relaxing night out.

"I like to come when it's not crowded," she says. "Otherwise it might be tough to get a seat."

Reach David McKay Wilson at [dwilson@thejournalnews.com](mailto:dwilson@thejournalnews.com) or 914-694-3528.