

# AMERICA CONQUERS NEW WORLD

Phoenix-based taco shop owner uses  
childhood lessons to build a national success

By JACOB GREEN  
Photograph by LILLIAN REID

**A**rmed with nothing but a passion for cooking quality homestyle Mexican food, America Corrales has managed to turn her mother's beloved recipes into a national franchise.

"Some of my earliest memories are cooking salsa and carne asada with my mother," Corrales said. "Everything I do now is what my mother taught me back home."

Corrales grew up in a small Mexican town before moving to the United States and working as a teacher in Phoenix for several years.

In 2008, after years of endless compliments from family and friends on her ability to replicate her mother's cuisine, Corrales and her husband Terry Bortin decided her skills were worth monetizing.

"I felt pretty confident that the food I was making wasn't available anywhere else in Phoenix," she said.

Despite the intimidating nature of launching a business venture at the dawn of the recession, Corrales said she believed the quality of her product could sustain the business.

The first America's Taco Shop in Phoenix was a huge success and instantly became popular for its authentic and quality-driven cuisine in a city saturated with uninspired Mexican restaurants.

Corrales said that she could not have imagined America's Taco Shop would expand beyond its original location.

"When we first decided to do this, we thought 'we'll just do one and keep it at that,'" she said. "But it didn't happen like that."

The first store was eye-opening for Corrales and her husband, who said they quickly realized the demand for America's tacos was higher than anticipated.

Just six months after opening the first Phoenix location, Corrales and her husband expanded the restaurant to another location in Phoenix, and then expanded into Tempe a year later.

Corrales' initial expectation, which was to open a restaurant in order to exercise her passion for cooking, was further exceeded in 2010 when Kahala Corp. — the franchising minds behind Cold Stone Creamery, Great Steak and Blimpie — approached Corrales about franchising her taco shop.

There are now nine America's Taco Shops in Arizona alone, as well as a location in Bethesda, Md., and one set to open in Corpus Christi, Texas. As well was making

America's Taco Shop available for franchisee, Corrales and her husband are opening another location under their management in Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport.

Corrales attributes the success of her company to her legitimate passion for what she does, which she said has allowed her to "have really high standards and pay close attention to detail," instead of being overly focused on money. That is a trait Warren Buffett and Steve Jobs deemed paramount to their successes as well. **AB**

