

A Westchase Classic Remains Relevant

Newly-renovated Churrascos Westchase adapts with the times

In November 1995, the owners of Churrascos wanted a more desirable location for the South American restaurant they started in 1988, so they moved to the newly-formed Westchase District staking out (no pun intended) the high-traffic corner of Westheimer and Gessner. In the 24 years since, both Churrascos and the District have grown tremendously and enjoy solid reputations thanks to a willingness to keep current with their respective marketplaces.

Keeping it contemporary

The Churrascos brand has expanded to include six Houston-area locations, as well as an Américas restaurant in River Oaks, the online-only Amazon Grill and Churrascos Catering. Last year, workers completed a renovation of the 10,000-square-foot location at 9705 Westheimer, allowing the facility to better accommodate rehearsal dinners, wedding receptions and corporate events. “After more than 20 years in a 40-plus-year-old building, we wanted to modernize things without losing the warmth of the hacienda touches,” said Fred Espinoza, Churrascos’ chief operating officer. “We took out some walls to create a more open feel near the bar, lightened the colors a bit and remodeled the restrooms. We took a bit of a risk because we didn’t know for sure how guests would react, but the response has been overwhelmingly positive. We’re glad we continued betting on Westchase.”



Be Our Guest: (From left) Manuel Callirgos, general manager; Paula Vargas, banquet and service manager; and Fred Espinoza, chief operating officer, invite you to experience first-class hospitality and delicious South American cuisine at the newly-renovated Churrascos Westchase.

Once the general manager of the Westheimer restaurant, Espinoza has been with the Churrascos Restaurant Group long enough to witness dynamic demographic shifts. “Over time, our clientele has shifted dramatically,” he said. “Fortunately, we’ve been able to adapt quickly. In the past three years alone, our catering business has taken off to where now it accounts for about 20 percent of our overall volume. Also, we’re the preferred caterers for the

Houston Texans. So even on days when our dining area doesn’t look full, the back of the house is still cranking out food.”

He added that Amazon Grill, a virtual restaurant, did more than \$300,000 last year without any real estate footprint. “People still want our food, but nowadays, they want convenience,” he said. “There are now more than 8,000 restaurants in Houston, so we are honored that people still choose us.”



Meating Expectations: Ordering the Churrasco, a signature center cut of certified angus beef, is never a mis-steak.

Showtime

Espinoza said Churrascos leadership doesn’t view the brand as merely a producer of food. “Rather, we see ourselves as an entertainment company,” he said. “We don’t have customers, we have guests. And, for an hour or so, we want them to be comforted in a stress-free bubble where, through our food, our service and our ambiance, we relax them and provide them with an awesome experience. It’s showtime for us.”

Manuel Callirgos, the restaurant’s general manager said that presenting an excellent experience extends to creating a fun and supportive environment for Churrascos team members as well. “We want them to feel welcome and appreciated and respected. In an industry with high turnover, we pride ourselves on the fact that at this location we have several of the original employees still with us and we have second and even third generations of teammates with us.”

Callirgos, who started as a Churrascos line cook out of culinary school, said he has fond memories of celebrating his ninth birthday in one of the private party rooms he now oversees. “There’s a lot of history here,” he said. “And a lot of plantain chips - we fry more than 500 pounds of plantains every week at this location alone!”

In addition to its famous plantain chips, Churrascos offers regular steak nights (\$15.95 after 4 p.m.), happy hour specials all day every Thursday and a Sunday brunch from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. featuring more than 60 items. “Come by and rediscover us,” Callirgos said. “Or, if you prefer, we’re happy to deliver to you.”

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