

Retailing

Charleston-based Taco Boy to dish up scratch made, Mexican-inspired fare in lower South End



Image: Savannah Copeland

Taco Boy's first Charlotte restaurant opens Tuesday.

SAVANNAH COPELAND



By **Jennifer Thomas** – Senior Staff Writer, Charlotte Business Journal

Jan 25, 2024

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Charleston-based Taco Boy has found its place in Charlotte.

That neighborhood taqueria debuts on Jan. 30 at 3700 South Blvd. in lower South End. It is part of The Station at LoSo.

Expect Taco Boy to dish up Mexican-inspired cuisine and cocktails – think margaritas with fresh-squeezed juice – in an eclectic and inviting space.

Founder Karalee Nielsen Fallert says the brand has invested roughly \$2 million into the space – about 50% more than expected as inflation drove construction costs higher. The restaurant spans 4,500 square feet, with an additional 2,500 square feet of patio space.



Image: Charlotte Business Journal

Taco Boy will open soon at The Station at LoSo.

Miguel Franco – known as "Chef Migs" – is Taco Boy's corporate executive chef. He's built a menu around tacos such as al pastor, grilled fish or the vegan-friendly Jackfruit Carnitas. All are served on house-made blue corn tortillas.

There's a variety of small plates such as crab and shrimp empanadas, the Taco Boy Queso or taquitas, where crispy corn shells are married with chicken tinga, green chile sauce, crema and salsa Cruda. The Guacamole en Molcajete is made fresh tableside. There's also quesadillas, burritos and enchiladas as well as soups and salads.

Margaritas run the gamut, with a fresh-juiced hibiscus version as well as the spicy margarita and Mezcalindo.

Fallert says the average ticket is about \$18 for lunch and \$28 for dinner.

The restaurant's design incorporates a custom mural from Charlotte-based artist Jen Hill. Fallert says it conveys a hopeful energy and lends a rhythm to the room and the space.

Colors set the tone for a vibrant and fun experience. There are light fixtures and folk art from Mexico, along with plenty of greenery. DJs will be in house Thursday night through Sunday brunch. Guests will find two different seating areas – a bar area with high-top tables and a more laid-back dining space, with booth seating creating cozy nooks. A rooftop jewel box will provide another option for small gatherings in the future.

“We want them to have the opportunity to escape into a place,” Fallert says.

Fallert wanted Taco Boy to fill an untapped market when she launched the concept 18 years ago. As a transplant in Charleston, she craved the Mexican cuisine she had grown up with in California.

“I took it for granted for sure,” she says.

She stumbled across a dance club that was closing and, before long, found herself touting the lack of tacos at the beach – particularly fish tacos – and fresh-made margaritas.

“I talked about some of the experiences I had and how I wanted to create that kind of transportive feeling, like they’ve stepped through the doors into a different place.”

Taco Boy quickly found its footing, later growing to three locations in the Charleston market.

“We’ve been kind of an institution in Charleston,” she says. She’s carved out a place in the city’s dining scene as founding partner and co-owner in a dozen restaurant ventures.

But the pandemic was a critical juncture and provided a chance to take inventory, Fallert says. The brand had to figure out how to rebuild to survive. It also needed to look toward the future. She watched the labor evolution and committed to a different way of operating.

Taco Boy recruited team members from Asheville, Charlotte and around the region. It set a metric focused on growing a team of professionals – not the number of stores or average unit volume they sold.

“That really set us on the trajectory for growth,” Fallert says

Charlotte marks the end of a growth spurt for the company. With the addition of the Queen City, Taco Boy has doubled its footprint in the last 13 months to six locations. It now reaches from Charleston to Asheville.

“I think Charlotte was a big move for us. But because there are so many great brands there and great operators, we didn’t want to show up and just throw our hat in the ring. We like to be a place of true gathering,” she says.

Fallert says Taco Boy’s role is to help create a strong community through food, hospitality and connections with local businesses and nonprofits.

She’s not ruling out additional locations here in the future.

“I think we would always love to be able to have more scale,” she says.

Barringer Construction was the general contractor for the restaurant space. Gensler was the architect on the project. Thrift Commercial Real Estate Services was the broker.

The restaurant will run limited hours through Feb. 6. It will be open for dinner service from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. and until midnight on Friday and Saturday. An opening fiesta is planned for Feb. 7, from 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. There will be \$5 margaritas, complimentary churros, a live DJ and hourly prizes.

Regular hours start on Feb. 8, with lunch and dinner service. Hours then will be Monday through Thursday, from 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., and Friday and Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to midnight.