

FOOD SCENE

Sonoran's Finest

Tucson is a hotbed of eateries that provide the best Sonoran hot dogs available in the U.S. However, recent James Beard Award winner and El Güero Canelo owner Daniel Contreras feels if you are going to truly eat the best dogs around, you should get them straight from its birthplace across the border, Sonora.



Q: Having been born in Sonora, Mexico, in the town of Magdalena de Kino, why did you choose Tucson to open your first hot dog stand and eventually your first restaurant?

A: The reason I chose Tucson is that my family immigrated from Mexico to Tucson; my mom was a U.S. citizen.

Q: Why hot dogs?

A: When I opened a hot dog stand back in 1993, there was no original authentic restaurant, with original authentic Mexican

food like carne asada. I have the best carne asada in the world, too. From the grill to your mouth. The reason for the hot dog stand was because that used to be my dinner— three or four hot dogs and a soda.

Q: You have your very own meat market—why did you open your own market instead of getting it from a third party?

A: My supplier wasn't giving me the quality meat every day, so I opened my own one five, six years ago to supply my restaurant.

Q: You have your own bakery and tortilla factory in your hometown of Magdalena de Kino. What does that do for the quality of food you serve in your restaurants back in Tucson?

A: When you have your own meat market and you have your own bakery, then you can control quality. When you get the meat and the bread from somewhere else, you can't control quality as well. That's the reason we opened the bakery, meat market and tortilla factory.

Q: You have three locations in Tucson. What do you love most about Tucson?

A: The people. Everything is about the people.

Q: What is the biggest change you have seen from when you first opened until now?

A: I used to sell around 10,000 hot dogs a week from one store; we sell that much in about three days now.

Q: How did you feel when you were announced as a James Beard Award winner?

A: I didn't know anything about it so I was surprised. It's still not in my head. This is huge. May 7th in Chicago, [I'm taking] my wife and my two kids.

Q: In Tucson, it gets pretty hot in the summer. Any places you like to go to get away from the heat?

A: Yes, all my places have air-conditioning. Some great ice cream places around here too.

Q: They are really big on the Old West reenactments here. Any favorites?

A: Yes, we go to Old Tucson, they play a lot of the old films and really do a good job.

Q: You were a pretty good baseball player as a kid. How does that help you in terms of being a successful restaurant owner?

A: Yes, I love baseball. That's my other passion. [After the game] I was so hungry for Mexican food, for something authentic, something original.

Q: Have you heard of the Mexican baseball fiesta held in Tucson?

A: Oh, yes. We supported them for the first three years. We made a huge profit off of those games [laughing].

Q: When you have friends visiting from out of town, is there anything you recommend they do while visiting Tucson?

A: We have a lot of places to go in Tucson. We have Mt. Lemmon, we have nice hotels for tennis and for golfing. If you want to take it easy, you have to come to Tucson.

Q: Any other great Sonoran restaurants you would recommend?

A: My restaurant, also El Molinito, I was there yesterday for my son's birthday. Tucson is the Mexican food capital. If someone wants to eat a Sonoran hot dog, they've got to go to El Güero Canelo's.

For more of Tucson's great places to eat, go to wheretraveler.com