



Photo courtesy of Español Restaurant

A group consisting of various Mexican organizations gather together at the second location of the restaurant during a visit by Mexican Consulate Dominguez.



East Sacramento News Photo/Lance Armstrong

Guests dine inside the Español Restaurant on Folsom Boulevard.

## Español: 'People come from miles around to buy our minestrone'

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terstate 5, resulted in the second relocation of the restaurant within a 13-year span of time.

### Moving to East Sac

Opening at its current site in 1965, the Español Restaurant, despite no longer serving unique food to Basque hotel tenants, carried forth many of its traditions in East Sacramento, near the historic Little Italy neighborhood.

Among these traditions included the presence of the popular waitress Mary Trabazo, who worked at all three sites of the restaurant.

Beginning her career with the Español in 1936, Trabazo retired from the restaurant 52 years later.

Waitress Leah Alcanter also dedicated her fair share of time as an Español waitress, as she worked at the restaurant for 35 years.

Many other employees, including 26-year waitress Diane Lara and 25-year dishwasher David Larsen, have spent many years at the restaurant throughout its history.

This history includes various famous diners such as actress Ann Sothorn, actor Leo Carrillo, singer Frankie Laine, boxer Max Baer, flamenco dancer Jose Greco, Gov. Earl Warren and Secretary of State Frank Jordan, Sr.

East Sacramento native Willie DaPrato, who was part owner of the restaurant with Babe and Mario from 1978 to 1985, said that he enjoyed

working with the Luigi family.

"I had a great time and (Babe and Mario) were two wonderful people," DaPrato said. "I had no problems. I went in on a handshake and I left on a handshake. Every now and again, I still drop into the restaurant. It's one of the finest family-owned restaurants in town with lots of home-style cooked food and it's just very good."

On Jan 1, 1988, Perry, Paula and Karen, who began assisting their father at the restaurant as children, purchased the Español from Babe, who passed away three months later.

Louise Luigi said that she is proud of her children's accomplishments as owners of the restaurant.

"They have done a wonderful job running the place and my husband (Babe) would be very proud to see that it is continuing on today," Louise said.

With a look around the Español on any given day, one can observe people who have been dining at the restaurant for many years, as well as those who are much newer guests of the establishment, which also includes a popular bar.

### Rave reviews

Español customer Mary Giacomotto said that she has been enjoying visiting the restaurant since it was located at 231 I St.

"In the old days, it was wonderful just going (to the res-

taurant) with our parents and (Rosemary and Ted Lehy) and their children," Giacomotto said. "It was very family-oriented and we would sit and have (soup) and wait for our parents to return from the bar. I also remember how my father (John Bateman) would start to sing there (at the restaurant) and then we would all sing and everybody around us would sing. Those were wonderful, wonderful times."

Perry said that the secret of the restaurant's longtime success is its traditional, family-style Italian dishes, as well as its great value and fine service.

The Español offers dishes ranging from veal cutlets and chicken cacciatore with polenta to cheese ravioli pesto and lasagna. Guests can also enjoy traditional spaghetti and raviolis with meat sauce.

Also among the restaurant's many menu items is its famous minestrone soup, Perry explained.

"People come from miles around to buy our minestrone soup-to-go for their dinners and family functions such as Christmas Eve," Perry said. "I think I sell more soup than any restaurant in Sacramento."

Complete lunches and dinners include tureen of minestrone soup, salad, an entrée of one's choice, pasta, vegetables, coffee or iced tea and spumoni.

Prices for these lunches range from \$9 to \$11 and the dinner prices range from

\$15 to \$20. And for those who prefer a lighter meal, soups and salads cost about \$5.

The restaurant also includes the following daily specials: roast turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy on Tuesdays, veal stew on Wednesdays, corned beef and cabbage on Thursdays and meatloaf on Fridays.

Paula said that people are attracted to the restaurant, in general, because it reminds them of the traditional, family-style restaurants of New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

"It reminds them of the Godfather-type restaurants," Perry added with a chuckle.

Español Restaurant, which has a seating capacity of 160, is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and on Sundays from 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Perry said that he takes great pride in carrying forth the tradition of what he refers to as "the Italian restaurant with a Spanish name."

"We're proud of our long history in East Sacramento, as well as the Old Sacramento area, and we invite people to take a step back in time and drive to East Sacramento to enjoy Sacramento's oldest restaurant," Perry said. "Come on in, join us and experience traditional, family-style cooking and be part of the Español family."

For additional information about Español Restaurant, call (916) 457-1936.

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