

A taste of Puerto Rico comes to Guilderland

By Matt Cook
GUILDERLAND—Although not a Puerto Rican herself, Kimberly Villafaña has fallen in love with the culture into which she married and is now sharing it with others through her Guilderland restaurant, Borinquen Bakery and Café.

"I chose this," Villafaña said. She has a background in catering, she said, and was confident her trips to Puerto Rico had prepared her for starting her own restaurant.

"I said, 'I could do this and there's nothing around here like that,'" Villafaña said.

'I love feeding people.'

Borinquen, named after the Taino Indian word for Puerto Rico, opened for business a couple of weeks ago. So far, Villafaña said, business at the storefront eatery on Western Avenue has been good and it is only getting better.

The whole place looks fresh and new—like it hasn't been broken in yet. A few tall wooden tables are placed on a clean tile floor; pastries—some familiar, some not—are lined up beneath glass counters.

The sounds of a Puerto Rican rain forest with the rhythmic croak of a coqui, a tree frog, play on a stereo in the corner.

The smells are warm and spicy. Borinquen serves pastries, sandwiches, and a lunch special every day, ranging from chicken, to meatloaf, to fish, all with a Puerto Rican flavor.

Villafaña was first exposed to Puerto Rican cooking on her many trips to the island with her husband, Ismael, to visit his family. When the couple moved to Guilderland for Mr. Villafaña to become the high school principal, Mrs. Villafaña was faced with a choice of what to do with herself. She could get a job, work at home as a homemaker, or start her own business.

The pastries she learned to bake on her own, but for help with the sandwiches and daily lunch specials, Villafaña turned to her Puerto Rican mother-in-law for help.

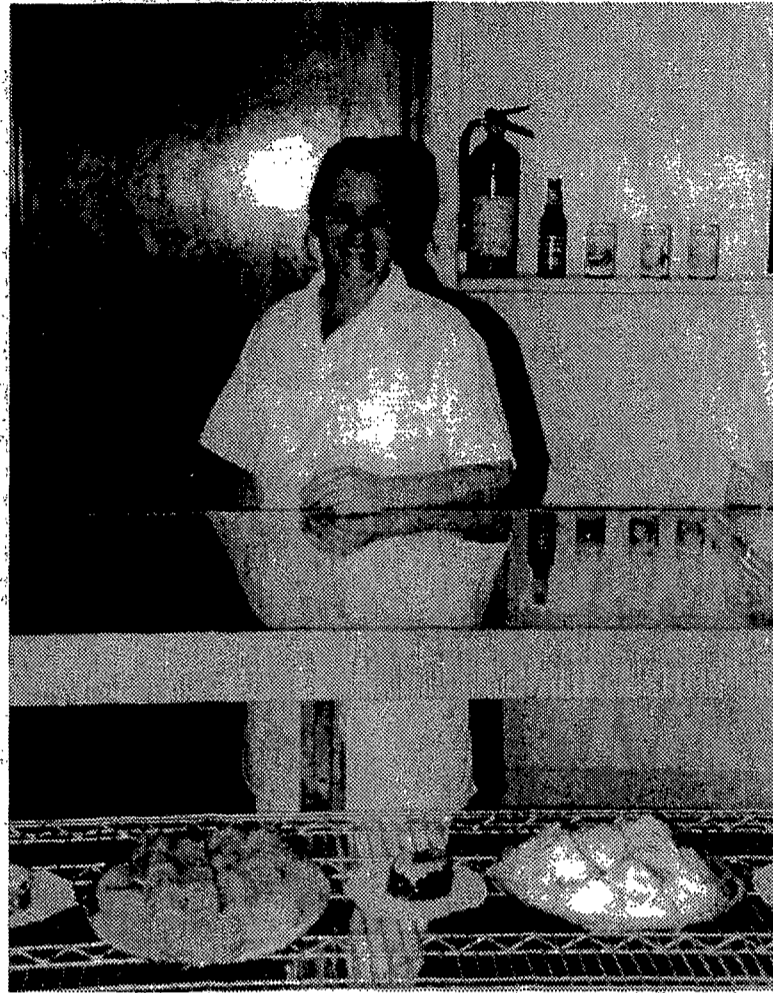
"She taught me how to cook their food," Villafaña said.

Although her mother-in-law is not a professional cook—she's a school principal, too—Villafaña said, the knowledge of cooking is part of the culture.

"Puerto Ricans are big on food," she said. "Very big on food."

The ingredients in Puerto Rican food are not all that different from American lunch fare, but they have Puerto Rican flavoring. One of the most common spices, Villafaña said, is an herb called recazo, a member of the cilantro family. There's also fruity flavor, orange and lime, and "a lot of vinegar," she said. All the meats—roast pork and beef, ham, and chicken—are spiced on-site by Villafaña. A salted pork, sofrito, is featured in many of the dishes.

Prices for sandwiches are around \$4 to \$6, and the lunch specials are all \$6.95. Villafaña said the most popular sandwich is the cubano, a ham and pork sandwich with Swiss cheese and



Tasty delight: Kimberly Villafaña, owner of the Borinquen Bakery and Café in Guilderland, shows off some of the Puerto Rican pastries available at her restaurant.

crunchy bread grilled on a press.

The pastries include pastelillos, puff pastry filled with guava, mango, cream, or cream cheese; and a cake soaked in three different kinds of milk, including co-

conut milk. For less adventurous customers, "I also have my American side," Villafaña said.

She said she can tell her new place is authentic from her mentor's recent visit.

"I would have to say it's very close, given that my mother-in-law was here and she liked it," Villafaña said.

She said area residents of Hispanic descent have also given her the thumbs-up.

"There's been quite a few Latinos," Villafaña said.

Her husband agreed with his mother; he said the restaurant is no different from one in Puerto Rico.

"It's what you would see in a bakery," Mr. Villafaña said.

So far, Borinquen has been a lot of work for Mrs. Villafaña. She said it took three months to get off the ground, and, as the sole staff, she has to work long hours every day, often starting at 4 a.m. and working through closing at 6 p.m.

"I cook all of it myself," she said.

Although she's now looking for help, she said the hard work is worth it.

"I love feeding people," Villafaña said. "I just enjoy it. I guess I'm very domesticated."

She hopes Borinquen will be a place where people can experience new tastes and come back for more.

"All I have to say is, 'Come in and try it,'" Villafaña said. "I'm willing to explain anything to anybody."

Borinquen Bakery and Café is at the Park Place Plaza in Guilderland, 2563 Western Avenue. It's open for take-out or eat-in weekdays from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Lunch hours start at 11 a.m. Call 218-1222 or fax 218-1221 to place an order ahead of time.

Lucky day in Knox, the bar's now open

By Matt Cook

KNOX—A local watering hole which almost dried up has been revitalized and its proprietors hope it will become a central meeting spot for area residents.

"We want to be a community bar," said Rita Meyers, manager of Lucky's Tavern, "a nice place that people can go and hang out."

Meyers was a regular at the old Township Tavern, on Township Road in Knox, when it shut down about two years ago.

Hoping to keep the place running, she told the owner she was interested in taking over. Her plan was to rent the bar, but when she shared her idea with her brother Owen Rivenburgh, he said he would buy it instead.

His concern was, what happens if the previous owner sells it to someone else? Meyers said.

When asked why he wanted to own a bar, Rivenburgh said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know." He said the bar is an investment for him.

Lucky's Tavern opened for business on Aug. 18 and there has already been a steady stream of customers.

"We're doing very well," Meyers said.

Last Friday afternoon, when Rivenburgh and Meyers met with *The Enterprise*, five or six people sat at the bar and a few more were coming in. The tavern was gearing up for the after-work crowd.

The 19th-century building has been sheathed in tan vinyl siding.

Inside, Lucky's Tavern has a completely renovated and expanded interior. Rivenburgh and his family did most of the work themselves.

"It's been a lot of work," he said.

The floor was a big part of the effort, as Rivenburgh had to tear up the old one and put it in a new one—including a black-and-white tile dance floor in the back room.

"The floors were really not leveled at all," Rivenburgh said.

Unlike its predecessor, Lucky's Tavern is licensed to serve hard liquor as well as beer, and soon food will also be available.

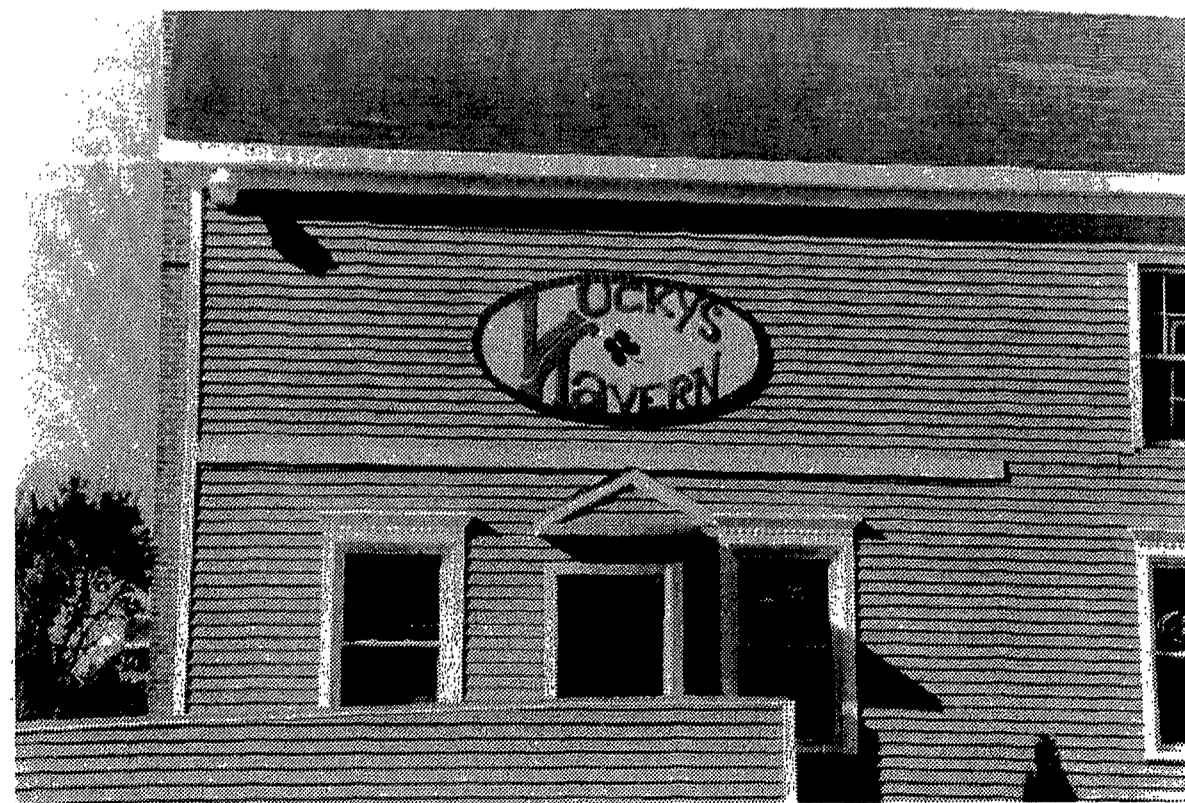
"Unfortunately, we don't have a kitchen yet," Meyers said, but one is in the works.

The family also installed a DJ booth at one end of the dance floor. Meyers said her son,

play is starting now. Meyers said there will be three or four league-play seasons each year, with trophies going to the winners.

"It'll be a lot of fun," she said.

Lucky's Tavern is located on 1412 Township Rd., Knox, and is open seven days a week. The grand opening is Saturday, Sept. 18. Midlife Crisis will play from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.



The Enterprise — Matt Cook

Watering hole: The newly renovated Lucky's Tavern, as it looks from the outside. The Knox bar is in the same building as the old Township Tavern. The grand opening will be on Saturday.

'A lot of fun.'

Stephen, will be manning the turntables on Friday and Saturday nights. Also, "We have some live bands scheduled," Meyers said.

The tavern's grand opening on Sept. 18 will feature the Berne band Midlife Crisis.

In addition to the music, the dancing, and the drinking, there's plenty else at Lucky's Tavern to occupy its patrons.

"There's enough activities in this bar to keep people busy," Meyers said.

The tavern has a pool table, two dart boards, and a shuffle board table. Sign-up for league

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