

Mesa Street Bar and Grill aims for affordable luxury

by Mia R. Cortez

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What started out as a hobby and a joint effort among many business partners now is the family-owned upscale Mesa Street Grill on El Paso's Westside, owned by Annette and Bill Means.

It first opened in 1998 as Mesa Street Bar and Grill, when the couple joined with business partners to take over the space at 2525 N. Mesa.

"Our vision was to have a restaurant in El Paso like those we would go to in Dallas, San Antonio - something more culinary, with good food and fine wines," said Annette Means, now co-owner and general manager.

But one of the business partners had a different vision, and for two years the restaurant was a college hangout where students could get a burger and a beer.

In 2000, the other business partners had fallen out and the Means were faced with deciding whether to walk away from it or pursue their own vision.

"It didn't have much of a financial future," Means said. "But El Paso was in need of a nice upscale restaurant."

They hired a chef,

designed a new menu, and did a décor makeover, she said. By the end of 2000, Mesa Street Grill had taken on a new identity.

One of the biggest challenges was marketing the restaurant, changing the perception from what they were to what they are now.

"Now we have linens on the tables every night, high-end liquors, culinary dishes and a vast list of very expensive wines," Means said. "We have quadrupled our business in the last four years. I attribute that to being unique in the El Paso food market. The quality of food at the price we give it."

Means, who would not disclose investment or sales figures, said their son, Aaron, works with her in the restaurant. Her husband, Bill Means, is president of Border Electric Mechanical Company.

Their intention, she said, is not to have a restaurant that many El Pasoans can only afford on special occasions.

"We are conscious of the El Paso market," Means said. "They should be able to eat here once a month and not feel like they spend a fortune when they come in, although



Annette Means, co-owner of Mesa Street Bar and Grill, shows off some of the upscale dishes served at the restaurant.

photo by Stacy Kendrick

they can if they want."

Prices on the wine list range from \$18 to \$185 a bottle or \$4 to \$12 a glass. Menu prices range from \$4 to \$28.

Being an upscale restaurant in El Paso brings its own challenges, Means said.

"The restaurant industry depends on expendable capital," she said. "As reasonable as our prices are, we can get cut real quick. To keep our quality, we have to keep our prices at a certain level and with El Paso's economy -

when there is not expendable income, that is hard."

World menu

Means describes their cuisine as American Nouveau, a fusion of Chinese, Italian, Indian, French, Southwest and American recipes. The menu offers specialty appetizers such as cream cheese-stuffed jalapenos, Southwest escargots, baked brie, and steak soup.

"When creating the menu, I tried to bring back some of the things I remember as

good eating in El Paso when I was growing up," Means said. "We have the rib eye cocktail, which is reminiscent of the prime rib cocktail at Sioux Street, and the chicken formaggio from the old San Francisco Grill."

Mesa Street Grill's pastry chef, Julie Aduato, has won awards in local and statewide pastry competitions for her Mesa Street Grill creations - crème brûlées, cheesecakes, bananas foster, crepes suzette and cherries jubilee, among others.