

The simple and the sensational—that's the latest legacy of Mesa Street Grill, highlighted by the region's only chicken formaggio, incredible steak soup (think Iron Tender's hay day!), rib-eye cocktail (rendition of classic Sioux Street) and grapefruit/avocado salad drizzled with an old home recipe of French dressing. These aren't offerings of former site incarnations College Station or Kamikaze's. Co-owner/general manager Annette Means strives daily since 2000 to continue overcoming the collegiate stomping ground reputation of shot specials, beer buckets and burgers.

The former criminal justice professor/coordinator for El Paso Community College for 23 years left academia to help her parents when her father became terminally ill. Then she helped her husband, Bill, with decorating and renovations, as he was one of multiple restaurant partners who acquired the establishment in 1998. When that dissolved, and Means worked through a variety of management changes, she decided that she was there so much anyways, she might as well general manage. Seizing the reins in 2000, her vision differed from previous proprietors.

As global travelers, she and Bill (president and past owner of Border Electric Mechanical, a subsidiary of Emcon, Inc.), wanted to build a reputation for one-of-a-kind fare of highest quality ingredients and from scratch creations in a seasonally changing menu. Every decision represents that effort to generate food and ambiance more like Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago and Europe as opposed to traditional regional options and ambiance.

There's still a great bar with high-end spirits, but clientele aren't starving students. "That's been the hardest part, transitioning from the college crowd and beer buddies to fine but affordable dining." It's paid off, as business doubled in the last four years with 15%-20% gains each recent quarter.

Before foraying into restaurant operations, all Means knew about food was how to throw a great dinner party—the rest has been hands-on with 52 employees (pros, students and industry staff), multiple shifts, lunch and dinner seven days a week (live music Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays), constant staff training and the priceless help of Aaron, one of her five sons and a De Paul graduate who is the kitchen manager.

Means' 65/hour weeks at Mesa Street Grill include a CFO partnership with CSI Security (commercial/residential services) and a managing partnership with Francis Communications, leaving little time for extracurriculars. Means spent years, before her Mesa Street Grill realm in numerous civic and non-profit volunteer positions, actively working boards and committees. She remains involved with the Texas Restaurant Association and National Restaurant Association.

"One minute I'm Mom, then I'm supervisor, but I've learned to let Aaron make judgments, call shots and keep personal separate from business. He's tremendously helpful and deserves much of the credit. So much of what has been accomplished is due to him either doing it, taking it over or helping in endless ways."

Despite frequent interior and menu changes, improvements and upgrades, some things will not change at Mesa Street: consistent great food, original unique recipes, and complete in-house preparation from breads to desserts. That's courtesy of Julie Adauto, pastry chef from California Culinary Institute and soon to be designated executive pastry chef following coursework at the French Culinary Institute in Massachusetts.

Means also credits husband Bill, the brainchild behind the master plan. "He helps us stay focused and directed, steering from behind the scenes. Mesa Street Grill is really his hobby that we operate for him. It's a labor of love."



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**ANNETTE MEANS**

Mesa Street Grill

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