

Lucio Honors Waitress of 50 Years

Austin, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville) honored Esther Araiza for 50 Years of food service at the Vermillion Restaurant with a Senate Proclamation for nearly half-a-century of honorable service to the community at this historic Brownsville establishment.

Served with Love: Waitress celebrates 50 years at Vermillion*

If the secret ingredient to good food is love, it's no wonder generations of customers have patronized The Vermillion Restaurant & Watering Hole to be in the presence of waitress Esther Araiza. Her family, friends and coworkers honored her Wednesday for 50 years of service at the Brownsville eatery.

Outside the restaurant, Texas state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. read Texas Senate Proclamation No. 764, which heaped praise on Araiza for her work ethic, kindness and named her a “true treasure of the Brownsville community.” He presented her with a Texas Capitol flag and a gavel. Four generations of the Lucio family came to know her, Lucio said.

“We need people we can look up to,” he said of Araiza. “Mom and dad loved Esther so much.”

The mom of 11 began her tenure at the Vermillion Aug. 12, 1968 and continued to work there in the evenings after getting a food service position with the Brownsville Independent School District. Araiza retired from the district in 2017 but kept her job at the restaurant.

“The only other person I saw serve for 50 years was Oscar Dancy, Cameron County judge, and you look better than him,” Lucio joked, earning a round of laughter from the crowd. “All of us are blessed to have you.” wai

Araiza was emotional as she accepted the awards and thanked the attendees.

“I don't know what to say,” she told The Brownsville Herald. “I love the people I work with. I enjoy my bosses, coworkers, the food is excellent.”

After the presentation, former BISD Superintendent Rachel Ayala stood up to express admiration for how Araiza worked evening shifts at the Vermillion and headed to her food services job early the following mornings for 25 years.

“She has touched so many lives, and she doesn't even know that,” Ayala said. “You are an example for all of us.”

Mariano “Bean” Ayala said he has been a Vermillion customer since he was 10 years old and continued the tradition of dining there with his children. His family made it a habit to eat there

after his son Michael's Hanna High School football games, he said, and Araiza was always ready to offer encouraging words when the team lost.

He read aloud a text message from his other son, Patrick, expressing regret about missing the ceremony. "Tell her I was working, (otherwise) I would be there to enjoy the special moment as a family," the message said.

Dan Davidson, who owned the restaurant for 44 years, said Araiza has served generations of Vermillion patrons.

"They came in here with their parents as newborns, and brought their kids as newborns," he said. "She knows most everybody in this town. You bring your children in, and they get raised by Esther. There are a lot of those generations that recognize Esther as being a classy and important person in their lives."

Araiza said she worked for Davidson's parents for five years before Davidson took the restaurant reigns. He sold the Vermillion in 2016.

"I (saw) many weddings, divorces, met so many people," she said. "I even sat down and talked to President Carter. Fluent in Spanish, by the way."

During his bid for reelection against Ronald Reagan, Carter gave a speech on education Nov. 1, 1980 at Texas Southmost College.

As to whether Araiza is looking to retire from the Vermillion down the line, she said it hasn't crossed her mind.

"Oh, no. Maybe when they fire me," she said.

That doesn't seem likely as her new boss is her son, George Perez, who started his own tenure at the restaurant when he was 13.

"We're proud of her," he said. "I've followed the same road. I learned from her."

* Tamez-Robledo, Nadia. "Served with Love: Waitress celebrates 50 years at Vermillion" *The Brownsville Herald*. 13 December 2018, https://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/local/served-with-love-waitress-celebrates-years-at-vermillion/article_09aa0980-fe61-11e8-b35f-437d91a9b846.html