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3-COURSE INTERVIEW

Shane Finkelstein
RESTAURANTEUR

Shane Finkelstein owns the Mexican restaurant Nacho Mama's in Denver, Colorado. He was interviewed in early March 2015 about the upcoming Nacho Mama's 3-Course Mexican Dining event in Denver, Colorado. Finkelstein spoke with Gabriel about the festival.

What inspired you to organize the festival?

I was always interested in putting on festivals or events. I was driving down to Benton Bridge and I just turned into another street and I saw how everyone was eating, and I said to myself, "I really want to do something that will benefit my own hometown." My friends in Denver produced the Top Taco festival there, and I asked them if they would help me produce something here. I wanted to do it for a charity, whereas in Denver it's a for-profit event. I wanted to work with a charity that wasn't someone that everyone was donating to, and I wanted to do something on a smaller scale, so I found a woman named Anna Thidemeyer who runs a charity called One Heart NOLA (www.oneheartsnola.com). They're a 100 percent volunteer organization that helps foster kids in New Orleans. Specifically, they help kids that have aged out of the foster care system. In the past, kids age out at 18, and most of these kids are still in junior or senior high school when this happens, and they lose their state funding, which basically means they get kicked out onto the street. So (Shane) NOLA helped these kids on a one-on-one basis. Last year their entire operating budget was $20,000, so they rely mostly on donations. But we're aiming to raise over $100,000 for them.

What can we expect from the event?

We chose to do the Mexican Festival because I love the spice and it's not like some of these other food festivals. The owner of the Colorado Gun (an independent gun store) works with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and they donated the (beer) for our VIP (section). There will be an on-site silent auction and live music.

Why tacos and tequila in New Orleans?

I own Nacho Mama's, and having a taco festival was the right thing for me. I think people don't realize that tacos is an open stare. It's a corn tortilla filled with whatever you want. You can add it. The our atmosphere of Latin cuisine in New Orleans, I think the market is ready to explore. We've seen with new restaurants and high-end taco restaurants like Johnny Sanchez, I think that influx is going to create a market where we see more and more of that type of Latin food in New Orleans. There's definitely a blend of Spanish food in our cuisine already. It's not a far reach to the other types of Latin food. I think it's going to be a really great opportunity for the people of New Orleans to sample the best of the best in one spot. We've driven really good barbecue restaurants that are (catering), and I'll restaurants that don't usually make tacos will make one of 5-6 tacos, including Vincent's (Italian Cuisine), Chiva, Nom, Cowbell and Nomine.

— HELEN FRIEND