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The Ramos' would like to see available real estate being populated by new, vibrant businesses. (PHOTO: Paul Fredrich)

Restaurant owners work to revitalize Burnham Point neighborhood



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By **Lori Fredrich**
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Published Jan. 15, 2014 at 1:02 p.m.

Most know Citlali Mendieta-Ramos as the owner of Antigua, one of Milwaukee's most inventive Latin American restaurants. But, members of the local community are beginning to get to know them as downright activists.

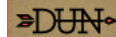
Recently named to the Business Journal's "40 Under 40" list, Mendieta-Ramos is no stranger to community activism. She was nominated as "Citizen of the Year" in West Allis in 2012, largely due to her hard work and volunteerism.

And, as a long-time board member for the West Allis/West Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce, Citlali has shown a commitment to the community and a desire to connect deeply and broadly with members of the business community.

recently, however, she's turned her focus to the neighborhood surrounding the restaurant, an area locals call Burnham Point.

The Point is roughly defined as the area between 55th and 63rd Streets, bordered by Mitchell Street to the north and Burnham Street and Beloit Road to the south.

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"This area used to be thriving," she says. "Some businesses like Scardina's Bakery have been around for 30 years. But, now there are lots of empty storefronts ... at least six are empty right here in the immediate area."

So, rather than sit back and rest on their laurels, the Ramos' got to work. Last winter, they called a gathering of area businesses to reinvigorate a long-abandoned concept – a Burnham Point Neighborhood and Business Association.

"Our aim was to bring businesses and the neighborhood together to improve the look and feel of it, the safety," says Mendieta-Ramos, "What it's really about is taking pride in the area. You see it on KK, in Walker's Point. Restaurants and entertainment venues really move things along, and we want to be part of that for this neighborhood."

The concept garnered interest, and together area business owners began to brainstorm. They identified a number of goals for the organization – including taking pride in the area, improving lighting on the streets, and working together to make the area more attractive to new vibrant businesses.

"We want the businesses to be known and supported by the larger community," she says. "We'd like to see a grocery store, other restaurants, a dentist office."

The group has received support from a number of organizations, including the West Allis Chamber of Commerce and the Mayor's Office.

"I feel the Burnham Point Neighborhood Association is going to bring a positive vibe to the area," says Mayor Dan Devine. "There is a ton of potential there, and bringing the residents and the business owners together will really accelerate the enhancement of that neighborhood. I also hope other neighborhoods will follow their model."

In addition to pulling businesses on board, the Ramos' also targeted involvement from the residential community. In the beginning, they went door to door and asked area residents to participate in monthly meetings.

"Participation was slow at first," Ramos says. "But people have started to take interest."

In November, the Association held its first neighborhood clean-up. They also raised money to purchase neighborhood holiday banners, which were posted along main streets in the area.

And area leadership is taking note.

"I give the Ramos' a lot credit for their time they have dedicated to revitalizing the Burnham Street neighborhood," says Vincent Vitale, alderman for District 1.

He says that he is currently working with the City of West Allis' Development Department to support the work of the neighborhood association in attracting new businesses to the area.

"The Association will be successful," he says, "If the business people on Burnham Street continue to work together towards the same goal."

The West Allis/West Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce echoes similar sentiments.

"Citlali and Nicholas have proven time and time again to be leaders in our communities," says Diane Brandt, executive director of the WAWM Chamber. "We are proud of them for their past efforts and applaud them for their initiative, leadership and drive in efforts with the Association."

According to the Ramos', the Association is working on a number of initiatives including implementing murals and other public art displays in the area. They've involved the West Allis branch of MATC to build planters for area businesses. And, next September, they hope to host a block party and open house to showcase the neighborhood and build interest in some of the empty storefronts in the area.

"The Burnham Point Neighborhood and Business Association is laying the groundwork for greater community involvement and ownership," says Patrick Schloss, West Allis community development manager. "We applaud that they have taken it upon themselves to make their part of West Allis a better place, and the City fully supports them in their mission."

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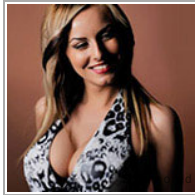
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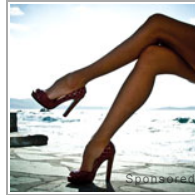
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Here are five restaurants I hope to dine in at some point during the New Year.



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Winter is in full force. Less daylight, cold temperatures and more time indoors can lead to a full-blown case of Seasonal Affective Disorder if you're not careful. So, it pays to have a plan to beat those blues before they begin. Here are 10 ideas to beat the cold and gloom.



"Classy" Milwaukee dining

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Whether it's out of monetary necessity or the desire to dine without having to get fancied up, sometimes it's nice to have a quiet night in. Rather than settle for run-of-the-mill meals, Milwaukee's food professionals want to make sure you're fully equipped to whip up a restaurant-quality dining experience in the comfort of your own kitchen.



Scouting report: Antigua

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A comfortable environment, a menu full of options with great specials at good prices make Antigua a hit with food writer Amy Schubert.

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