

Easy to miss, hard to pronounce, Tlaolli is worth the effort

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Samantha Hutchinson helps her father, Carlos, with graphic design and decor at Tlaolli, a small tamale shop at 2830 E. Washington St. / Jolene Ketzenberger/The Star

Tlaolli

• **Cuisine:** Mexican • **Price range:** less than \$10 • **Location:** 2830 E. Washington St. • **Contact:** (317) 410-9507; www.tlaolli.com

If the little lavender house at 2830 E. Washington St. catches your eye, do yourself a favor and stop in. Because inside you'll find tamales and other Mexican fare made a little more healthful by Tlaolli owner Carlos Hutchinson.

It isn't health food, of course, but Hutchinson has trimmed the fat in his traditional family recipes by losing the lard and using olive oil instead. With help from one daughter who is a chef and another who handles his graphic design, Hutchinson opened the tamale shop in May next door to the Indianapolis Public Library's East Washington Branch.

It's a promising little area, with a nice green space behind the restaurant and the possibility of a coffee shop opening up next door, but even though the small building is painted an eye-catching color, you could easily miss it. But make sure you don't, because it's definitely worth a visit.

Tlaolli is an Aztec word for corn, a reference to masa, the corn dough that's wrapped around tamale fillings. Since opening the carry-out tamale shop in the spring, Hutchinson has been serving up chicken, pork, cheese and bean tamales along with such specialties as red chicken mole, pork carnitas and a chicken calabacita goulash that was just delicious — which is not to say that other items weren't as tasty, because they were.

Salsas were fresh and bright, chips crisp and salty and all the dishes packed plenty of flavor, especially the sample of churro beans offered to customers in honor of Mexican Independence Day. The vegan-friendly dish, made with pinto beans and soy chorizo, had a deep, rich flavor, despite its lack of pork seasoning. Even the rice was super-flavorful, and we agreed with Hutchinson's graphic designer daughter Samantha, when she said, "My dad makes the best rice."

And while we loved the calabacita goulash and the red mole (both \$6), we'll also be going back for more tamales. We tried the chicken, pork and cheese versions (\$9 for three) and enjoyed them all; we didn't even miss the flavor of lard in the masa. Hutchinson has a deft hand with spices, and credits his daughter the chef with helping him hone his cooking skills. He'll tell you that his food is simply home-style fare and that he wants you to feel at home in his little tamale shop. And that's exactly why we liked it.

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