

# Entrepreneur of The Month



BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIES FROM WITHIN

## SONORA GRILL

**Address:** Midtown Global Market, 920 East Lake Street • Minneapolis, MN • 55407 **Owners:** Alejandro Castillon & Conrado Paredes

Sonora Grill opened in 2011 to high praise from customers and critics alike. A fusion of Spanish and South American cuisine, with influences from the owners' native Sonora, Mexico, Sonora Grill boasts a 100% scratch kitchen. Everything, from the cilantro aioli to the wiener in the famous Sonora Hot Dog, is prepared from scratch in their Midtown Global Market kitchen. The only exception is the buns, which travel the long distance across the market from the Salty Tart bakery, where they're made fresh daily.



Fernando Armenta, Alejandro Castillon, Conrado Paredes

After ten years of working in some of the Twin Cities' finest restaurants (most recently as a sous chef at Bar La Grassa), Chef Alejandro Castillon dreamed of entrepreneurship. Lack of capital and previous business experience, however, stood in the way. He partnered with Conrado Paredes, a friend from Sonora, and the two found the perfect location to open their first restaurant in NDC's small business incubator, the Midtown Global Market, where they'd receive assistance with launching their business. With Castillon's cousin, Fernando Armenta, helping out in the kitchen, the team brings intensity to the already diverse flavor of the South Minneapolis public market.

"When we started this process we had no business experience whatsoever, as far as projections, writing a business plan, etc.," Paredes admits, "Alejandro knew food, but that was about it." They worked with NDC's Technical Assistance Manager Perla Mayo to figure out their projections and work on their business plan, and received a loan from NDC to finance the start-up

equipment for their kitchen. They also received pro-bono legal assistance through NDC's partnership with Fredrikson & Byron with incorporating their business. "That was really important. At the time, there's no way we could have done that without NDC."

Alejandro admits that being a business owner is much harder than working for someone else. They work seven days a week in order to accomplish their goals. But the reward is infinitely better, he says. They have the freedom to create the menu, offering new and innovative specials each week, and it's a great feeling to have happy customers who come back again and again.

In their six months of operation, Sonora Grill has grown to employ five people. They're dreaming of their next step, but for now want to focus on running their business the best they can. Their advice for entrepreneurs: "It doesn't matter if it's food, or a shop, or cars, you have to know what you're doing if you want to be successful. Just provide the best customer service you can and the best quality. And that's what we try to do."

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