

15 MINUTES

Caffeinated legacy

Oziel Magaña is an attentive shop owner. During a recent interview at Mondos Coffeehouse, he checked in with a regular who'd taken the last drip of coffee in a dispenser and thanked a couple of students on their way out the door. He gushed about his team of 14 part-time workers, seven of whom participate in a work training program through Far Northern Regional Center, which serves individuals with developmental disabilities. Magaña, who has a background as a social worker, gave himself "a major crash course" in business ownership when he purchased Mondos in 2009 with his brother, Esteban (the pair closed their former shop, Euro Cafe, to run Mondos). Now, as the brothers celebrate 10 years in business, Magaña is pursuing his master's in business administration. He's also dedicated to nurturing what he sees as a legacy business in Chico—Mondos was founded in 1997 by Tim and Brandee Hamor. The shop, at 995 Nord Ave., Ste. 100, is known for its cozy atmosphere and lush display of indoor plants—along with its coffee and delicious breakfast sandwiches.

How have things evolved over a decade?

We really have changed the business quite a bit. A lot of it was,



PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

we had to offer what students were looking for but still honor our locals. We had to make sure we were different from [Starbucks]. So the coffee bar was a huge part of it for us. We got a super automatic [espresso machine], so we got the speed up. We decided to mix our own sauces [like chocolate sauce]. A lot of [drinks] we actually go back and grind chocolate bars [for flavor]. The other thing was the food. We went from selling one [sandwich] a day to last Saturday [April 6], before noon, we sold 67.

What are you most proud of?

You have to be a little bit crazy to do food service. Your margins are super thin, there's always something breaking, there's always a competitor. I would always look at it like, I owe it to myself to have this place for individuals with disabilities to have that place where they can come to and actually be

a part of a team that doesn't just say, "You have a disability." You're a peer to us. You pay taxes, just like anyone else ... customers get to be a little bit snarky to you. Not only do we want you here, but you're [also] needed here.

What's next for Mondos?

At some point—I'm not eternal—I'm not going to be here. And it's really important for me that this continues. I really want it to be a legacy ... to be there and grow ... for it to continue having that identity, being a place where people can come to and they can be themselves, and be considered a part of the community. I'm glad that [the] family that we've grown here has been not just behind the counter but also customers. We have this little, unique group of people that are like, "We're Mondos."

—ASHIAH SCHARAGA
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THE GOODS

The Kettle is on



by
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Kevin Jaradah is building up quite a portfolio of businesses here in Chico, in a short amount of time. In fact, this Friday (April 19) marks the one-year anniversary of **The Lab Bar & Grill**, the science-themed pub off of Cohasset Road that boasts a variety of beers on tap and quite possibly the best chicken sandwich in town (I might, however, need to sit down for a side-by-side comparison with the version at **Bill's Towne Lounge**).

As if running the Lab and **Spike's Bottle Shop** weren't enough, Jaradah's got a new venture. Last Saturday (April 13), I stopped in to check out **The Brew Kettle**, on Nord Avenue across from Safeway. What a cool little place! It's a combination craft brew bar/liquor store/lounge and like nothing else currently in Chico.

When I got there, a handful of people were occupying futons along a wall and a table in the center of the space. I ordered a half-pint of a blonde ale and sat on a futon in one of about half a dozen groupings, each of them facing its own big-screen TV. The reggae on the stereo was a refreshing break from the seemingly constant pop noise everywhere else.

"I just want this to be a chill spot," Jaradah told me. So far, it's working. At the moment, in terms of food, he's just serving tamales—from the infamous **Mary**, who also makes tamales and fried chicken for the **Durham Country Market**—but hopes to expand the kitchen offerings. And, with an alcohol license that allows him to sell solely beer, he hopes to attract an all-ages crowd. The bonus: You can buy beer to go. Best of luck!

SANDAL SEASON Just in time for the warm weather, **Baker's Birkenstock** is celebrating its 43rd anniversary. Stop by the Chico shop, on Broadway—which currently also houses the **Paradise store**—now through the end of April and enter to win \$100 credit to the store. The shop has super cute sandals and an awesome selection of socks. I can't bring myself to get on board with combining the two, though!

SIGN SAVED I had no idea until earlier this week that local homeless advocate/tree hugger **Charles Withuhn** also happens to be a woodworker. Apparently, he carved the iconic sign that hangs outside **Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.** back in the 1980s. Sadly, it was hit recently by a truck and broken into several pieces—but do not fear, it's been rehung after some TLC from Withuhn, who gifted the roughly \$2,500 job to **Ken Grossman** as a way to thank him for all the generosity he's shown since the Camp Fire. How's that for good karma?

BACK IN TOWN After abruptly shutting down the **Tesla Energy** operations in Chico last summer and laying off 30 employees there, the company is poised to reopen its Huss Lane office in another capacity: as a service station. As far as I'm concerned, the company owned by **Elon Musk** has some work to do reputation-wise locally, so let's hope it treats its new employees better than its old ones.

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