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The Rock Valley Bee



Lorena Leños who loves to cook, reopened Las Peñas after years of requests to bring the restaurnat back to Rock Valley.

Las Peñas debuts on Main Street

By SAM BONNER
STAFF WRITER

For those seeking an authentic taste of gorditas and other Mexican classics, Las Peñas has made its return to Rock Valley.

Opening on Sept. 22, Las Peñas still provides Mexican groceries, but adds a new restaurant space to serve guests traditional meals. For owner Lorena Leños, it is a return to serving food after closing her previous restaurant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking through a translator, Leños said the thing she kept hearing the most after she closed the restaurant five years ago was “When are you going to reopen?”

Leños loves to cook and began her first restaurant after hearing from friends looking for ‘a good authentic Mexican restaurant.’ She became especially known for her gorditas, a traditional Mexican dish made with masa and stuffed with fillings.

“Where they’re from in Mexico, that’s all they sell. There’s a lot of people from the same town in Mexico and were looking for authentic gorditas,” said Leños’ translator.

The longtime business owner first started a grocery business in 2009 operating out of Sioux Center. In 2014 she moved her business to Rock Valley and named it Las Peñas.

The name translates to “the rocks” and is named after a famous place in Mexico.

Leños remarked on the response she’s received so far since opening.

“People have been so glad she opened because they love her food. They just say, ‘don’t close it.’”

At A Glance:
Business: Las Peñas
Owners: Lorena and Ignacio Leños
Address: 1404 Main St, Rock Valley
Hours: 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday-Tuesday
10 a.m.-10 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday
Contact: (712) 476-5584
Online: On Facebook
Open Date: Sept. 22

Supervisors receive update on Highways 75 & 18: Discussions continue on safety concerns

By SAM BONNER
STAFF WRITER

Continuing the discussion on improving safety, the Sioux County Board of Supervisors during the meeting on Oct. 14 received an update on plans for the intersections of highways 75 and 18 west of Hull.

Addressing the safety issues of the two junctions of highway 75 and 18 was a major focal point at the Sept. 16 meeting after 17-year-old Axel De Santos of Rock Valley was killed and 17-year-old Dominic Olvera Flores of Rock Valley was airlifted after a vehicular collision at the north intersection.

In September, the Sioux County Sheriff’s Office estimated there have been 15 collisions reported in the last year at the two intersections. Six incidents occurred at the northern junction, and nine at the southern junction, known as Perkins Corner.

County engineer Joel Sikkema and Sioux County Sheriff’s Office chief deputy Nate Huizenga met with members of the Iowa Department of Transportation this month to begin conversations on the junctions as well as the intersection of highways 75 and 10 north of Maurice, known as the Million Dollar Corner.

“We came away saying the DOT does really want to make improvements to address the safety there, and they recognize the issue and want to move forward with it,” Sikkema said.

During the meeting, a consensus was reached on roundabouts as the long-term solution for the junctions of highway 75 and 18.

“The roundabout is the right answer, you slow traffic down, you keep it moving,” Huizenga said. “Like the one in Orange City. If you would put a stoplight where the roundabout is now, in the morning for school traffic you’d have cars backed up all the way to Alton.”

Each junction of highways 75 and 18 would be turned into a roundabout, with the proposed project beginning with the north intersection. However, the Highway



On Thursday, Oct. 9, at the intersection of highways 75 and 10, a 2025 Peterbilt semi and hopper trailer carrying distillers dried grains was involved in a four-car accident. The collision and resulting spill took nearly three hours to clean up.

75 and 10 junction was deemed unable to fit a roundabout due to the nearby bridge and railroad.

Instead, offset turning lanes were proposed for the Highway 75 and 10 intersection. Offset turning lanes involve creating a physical gap between lanes to increase visibility for drivers.

“That is not a perfect solution by any means,” Sikkema said. “But at least the offset turn lane pulls the turn traffic a full lane to the east so that when you are at the intersection it’s easier to look to the south to see if somebody’s coming.”

Supervisor Carl Vande Weerd asked whether stop signs or streetlights could be a solution for the intersection.

“With stoplights if you have people coming, you’re going to change your collisions from side impact to rear end,” Huizenga said. “You’re used to going 60 mph in that intersection and all of a sudden people are stopped, you’re just going to plow into the back of people.”

As Sikkema explained, driver behavior responds to physical change.

“With traffic lights there is no crash reduction. It’s more of an efficiency capacity thing,” Sikkema said. “You’re not actually changing

the intersection, you’re trading one crash for another.”

The earliest dates for the proposed roundabouts would be 2029 for the first and 2030 for the second. However, the dates are highly subject to securing funding.

According to Sikkema, the DOT has six districts that compete for funding on road safety projects. For projects to be moved to the top of the list, counties need to show community support.

“The more local support and showing there are dollars to back it, that’s what gets those projects over the finish line,” Sikkema said.

For a roundabout, the county would be expected to cover 10 percent of the costs. Sikkema did confirm the county would be able to use the secondary road fund to pay for it.

“It’s not as if we’re taking money from other departments to fund it. It means on my end that a culvert project may be pushed off,” Sikkema said.

The DOT plans to attend the Nov. 12 supervisors meeting with a more detailed plan on the intersection. In the meantime, the county will focus on gaining letters of support before a deadline of Oct. 24.

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Faith Reformed Church adds Spanish meeting

By SAM BONNER
STAFF WRITER

Hoping to create a welcoming environment, the Rock Valley Faith Reformed Church has added a Spanish program to be held once a month beginning in November.

“It’s not a mass, and it’s not a church service really, it’s a gathering,” said Faith Reformed Church pastor Thomas Kunkel.

Starting on Nov. 2, the church will launch the program titled the Refuge to be held in the gathering space. The program will meet on the first Sunday of every month from 5-7:30p.m..

It will be the first Spanish language program at the church, and for Kunkel it’s a return to his roots. Kunkel served as a pastor in Guadalajara Mexico for 15 years, and his wife and son were born in Mexico.

On why he wanted to launch a Spanish speaking program.

“We speak Spanish, and there’s a lot of Spanish speaking people here in Rock Valley. We wanted to give them a place where they can come and learn about Jesus,” Kunkel said. “Until last year my entire pastoral ministry had been in Mexico. So, it feels very natural to me.”

The meetings will focus on parables and teachings of Jesus, with music and prayer. Kunkel wants the environment to be relaxed and open.

“Coffee and cookies and time just to talk and hang out. That’s the idea of it, but in Spanish,” Kunkel said.

It is not meant to be a replacement to a church service, but an addition open to nonparishioners. Kunkel chose the afternoon timing to avoid overlap with service times of other churches and the traditional Mexican dinner time.

“The purpose wasn’t to make a competition,” Kunkel said.

Repeating the words he said when founding a church in Mexico.

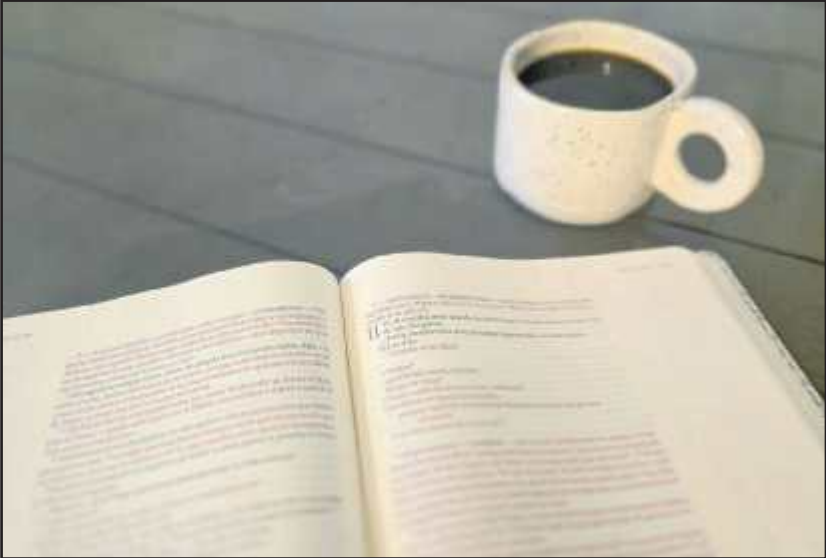
“If somebody already has a good church that has solid teaching where they’re being fed, I don’t want them to come here. I want them to stay and be faithful to their church.”

Instead Kunkel aims to have discussions open to anyone who attends.

“There will be a message, but people can interact on the topic. Not as informal as a class, but not quite a sermon. Somewhere in the middle,” Kunkel said.

Having served as the Faith Reformed Church pastor since the end of last year, Kunkel has enjoyed being part of the community of Rock Valley and aims to work on supporting the area.

“Life’s rough, it’ll kick you around a good bit. The one anchor that we have in the storm is Jesus,” Kunkel said. “We really want to give



Faith Reformed Church pastor Thomas Kunkel wants the new Spanish meetings to be an open and relaxing space, “Coffee and cookies and time just to talk and hang out. That’s the idea of it, but in Spanish.”

people a place where they can be refreshed and have a safe harbor.”

Regardless of denomination or faith, Kunkel welcomes anyone to attend the new program.

“Even if it’s someone who’s never

been to church at all. That they would feel like this is a place where they could come. They could get to know people, be refreshed, and edified,” Kunkel said.



October 23 | Faith Church, Rock Valley
Register by October 3 to guarantee a t-shirt!
Register: bit.ly/growthedistance25

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