

SUCCESS STORIES

Mexicans in Canada

In recognition of Mexicans residing in Canada who have excelled in areas such as arts, culture, education, sport, civic involvement or science, the Embassy of Mexico will permanently dedicate this space to those individuals whose successful career paths and outstanding achievements serve to inspire the Mexican community in Canada.

Axel Arvizu and Juan Román (Entrepreneurs)



Hands over the dough

Those in the know say that an authentic Mexican tortilla has two sides, which becomes evident when it is heated on a *comal* (traditional hearth for baking tortillas), since one side – the uppermost – inflates.

At Toronto's *La Tortillería*, the final, and authentically Mexican, product also has two sides: Axel Arvizu and Juan Román.

These young entrepreneurs of 26 and 27 years old, respectively, knew each other as children in Mexico City, and coincidentally met up again studying at Ryerson University, where they eventually agreed to work towards an ideal: to produce a truly Mexican food product and position it in Canada's culinary marketplace.

It was not an easy challenge, but with talent and dedication they managed to consolidate what could be considered a "well-rounded business," not only because of

the circular shape of this legendary and nutritious corn product, but because it has been successful enough to draw even the attention of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who chose to visit the St. Clair location of *La Tortillería* during his tour of Toronto, to announce the investment of \$10 million into the Canadian Youth Business Foundation (CYBF), which grants credits and provides consulting services for young entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 34.

With this visit, which took place in early March 2009, Harper literally caught the pair of young Mexican entrepreneurs with their "*hands over the dough*". And there, in front of the tortilla machine, he publicly recognized them for forming part of the generation of Canada's innovative, employment-generating entrepreneurs, having industrialized in Toronto the famous tortilla, a baked round of dough of pre-Hispanic origin that serves as a dish, an eating utensil, and the base of the authentic, infamous Mexican taco.

And such acknowledgement was certainly well deserved. Axel and Juan have completely transformed *La Tortillería*: it is currently a restaurant and supplier of various proudly Mexican products, and has inaugurated its fourth Toronto location, providing permanent employment to 32 Mexican-Canadians.

In addition, *La Tortillería* supplies 60% of the restaurants in the city with a demand for tortillas, achieving in less than a year an expansion that normally would have taken decades for any business in the food production and distribution sector.

Perhaps because of such success this business was selected as the site to announce Canada's Economic Action Plan. At the end of the presentation, Prime Minister Stephen Harper received as a gift from Axel and Juan a sample of Mexican salsa – from their own production– appealing to the taste the Canadian leader has developed for spicy food, a preference that greatly surprised President Felipe Calderon when they had the opportunity to break bread recently.

But despite such positive results, the business activity has not distanced Axel or Juan from their ideal of supporting the Mexican community in other projects.

They also established the not-for-profit *Crea México* foundation, which aims to promote Mexican talent through regularly scheduled conferences for interested groups, and founded *EMMEX Corp.*, a Mexico-Canada import-export company that seeks to promote bilateral trade.

Additionally, Axel was elected to serve as a representative for Mexicans in the provinces of Ontario and Manitoba on the Advisory Board of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (CCIME), where he has done outstanding work without seeking any recognition; in other words, blue-ribbon efforts, without the blue-ribbon.

***NOTE: If you know a *Success Story* about a Mexican resident in Canada that you believe should be included in this space, please send your proposal to the Embassy of Mexico in Canada, through its Press Attaché Alberto Lozano, at e-mail: alozano@embamexcan.com**