

By Ralph Buglass

“CHACARERO” EATERY OWNER **JUAN HURTADO**

So just what does “chacarero” mean anyway? It’s a traditional Chilean sandwich. But to Juan Hurtado, it’s meant his livelihood for about six years; more, it’s been the basis of an increasingly successful business.

A native of Chile who came to Boston just over a decade ago, Hurtado is the owner of Chacarero, a walk-up window eatery set into the Franklin Street facade of Filene’s in Downtown Crossing. With the

help of nine employees, including his sister and brother-in-law, he serves up several varieties of chacareros to throngs of lunchtime patrons daily.

Customarily, there’s a steady line of customers from late morning through mid-afternoon. Inside, Hurtado and his employees work feverishly in the cramped quarters through the lunch

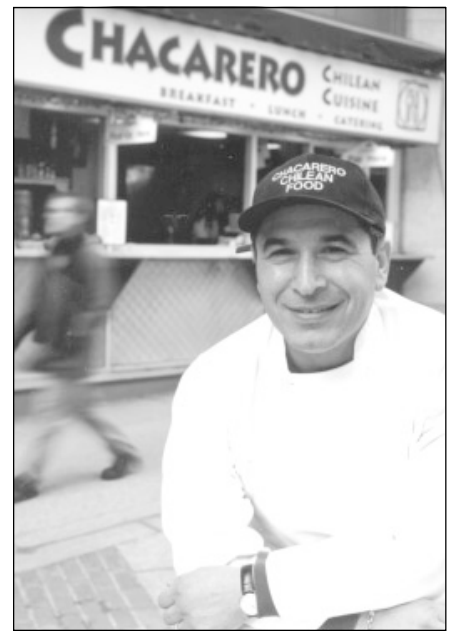


Juan Hurtado knows many customers on a first-name basis.

rush, but he still takes time to chat with his customers. Many of those in line are regulars he greets by name, others are newcomers drawn by the crowd or, perhaps, the aroma.

Whether they choose chicken or beef, large or small, or opt for the hot barbecue sauce (“my own recipe,” the engaging eatery owner beams),

a chacarero starts with a round light cornmeal cake-like bread baked on the premises earlier in the day. That’s sliced in half, spread with mashed avocados and topped with tomato and cheese slices and red peppers. Depending on a customer’s preference, Hurtado adds the hot sauce and the grilled meat



Traditional Chilean sandwich = Classic American success

(vegetarian is also an option). The final ingredient—what makes it unique—is a mound of steamed green beans.

“It’s different but delicious, fresh, and healthy,” says Hurtado, who displays a perfectionist’s love for his creations. He goes to a food distribution warehouse in Chelsea early each morning and picks “the freshest, best looking vegetables” himself. “That way you get the best flavor,” he explains. “I want people to like my food. I want to feel proud.” The favorable reviews his take-out restaurant has gotten from the *Boston Globe* and other papers attests to the painstaking pride he has in his work.

Hurtado started out selling his sandwiches by himself from a pushcart outside Filene’s. “I always wanted to work for myself,” he says of his start in business. But getting that start wasn’t easy, beginning with the needed

Digesting the Regulations involving Food Vendors

Before Juan Hurtado could sell his first chacarero sandwich, he had to contend with an imposing array of regulations governing on-street vending in Boston. Like Hurtado, any on-street vendor in the city is confronted with a two-tiered process—requiring forms and fees for both state and city agencies. The whole endeavor, on top of the challenge of launching a business, is almost enough to deter even the most intrepid urban entrepreneur.

To become a legal “vendor, transient vendor or hawker” in Massachusetts, one must begin at the state level by

obtaining a license for about \$60. In addition, a \$500 bond is required; insurance, ranging from \$200 to \$300 annually, is mandatory.

Securing a location anywhere in Boston except in prescribed areas is difficult. Pushcarts that operate in Downtown Crossing must be authorized and rented from the Downtown Crossing Association, a merchants group.

Obtaining a municipal permit is the next step. If food is to be sold, a whole host of city agencies—ranging from public works to inspectional services to health—must grant their approval to

the operation, and with each agency there is a separate fee. A “food managers’ course” is also required by the city.

Take-out restaurants, like Hurtado’s present establishment, bring still more regulations as well as zoning issues.

For a look at government regulation vis-a-vis other small businesses, access the Pioneer Institute *White Paper* “Economic Opportunity in Boston: An Index of the Regulatory Climate for Small Entrepreneurs,” at www.pioneerinstitute.org/research/whitepapers/wp8cover.cfm.

approvals. “I had to go to a lot of different offices and fill out a lot of paperwork. The rules and forms were hard to understand,” he recalls. “The first time, they said no. I kept trying. I wanted to sell something different, unique, so it took a lot of convincing.”

Once he had the pushcart, it was still hard. He would bring all the ingredients himself each day from his North End home—“I baked the bread at home and carried the chicken in a cooler.” Although typical of the enterprising Hurtado, that was technically a violation, so he had to rent a nearby kitchen where he could do most of the preparation. Of course, he also endured weather extremes—“but the customers would still be there, even in snow,” he notes.

“I worked hard but had dreams,” Hurtado says. Those dreams led him to acquire a second, far more elaborate pushcart, though he had to spend approximately \$10,000 on it for cooking and sanitary equipment to meet city health regulations.

He continued to draw more customers. “The lines were so long, Filenes’ manager came to me one day



Hurtado and his employees during the lunch rush.

and asked if I’d like to move to this spot inside the store building,” Hurtado says. It was a big break, but meant obtaining financing for the rent and new equipment to comply with additional government regulations. Though inspections are usually annual, he notes that “the health inspector came out three times the first year even though I got 100 every time.”

It’s been three years since he moved to his present location. He’s taken on employees (who “care about what they do” as much as Hurtado because of a profit-sharing arrangement, he says) and truly become a small business owner. “Here, if you work hard, you can do well,” he says simply. In fact, his busy but smooth running operation has become so successful that he’s gotten franchise and buy-out offers, but has turned all of them down.

He’s pursuing a new dream, looking to acquire a regular sit-down restaurant nearby, so he can still run Chaceraro, too. Though he has a bank loan, finding “just the right place” has been hard—zoning considerations and the myriad new regulations he’d face are somewhat of a concern, but the immediate hurdle stems in part from his own high standards.

“One restaurant I looked at was so dirty I was surprised it had passed inspection, because of what I’ve had to go through,” he says.

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