

Los Nortenos offers an eating experience

By MARY COX
Staff Writer

Part of the fun of trying new places to eat is the hope that you'll find a diamond in the rough, a place few people know about that you can call your own. But you take chances when you play this game of Russian roulette, because there's often more bad than good.

Judging from the exterior and its location, Los Nortenos, a Mexican cafe, on Main Street in Bryan, could be considered for the diamond in the rough category—with emphasis on the rough side. The exterior is dive-ish looking, and the Hotel Charles next to it is down right spooky. This is definitely not the place to take a first date you're trying to impress.

The food's much better than the place looks, although that's not saying much. The Carne Guizado, the Mexican version of stew, has chunks of beef and potatoes in a thick, spicy gravy for \$4.10, and it's good. The beef and cheese nachos were even tasty enough to make up for the chips being soggy. And the chicken enchiladas were pretty good. But don't get a craving for tacos al carbon here because the meat was over-done and dry.

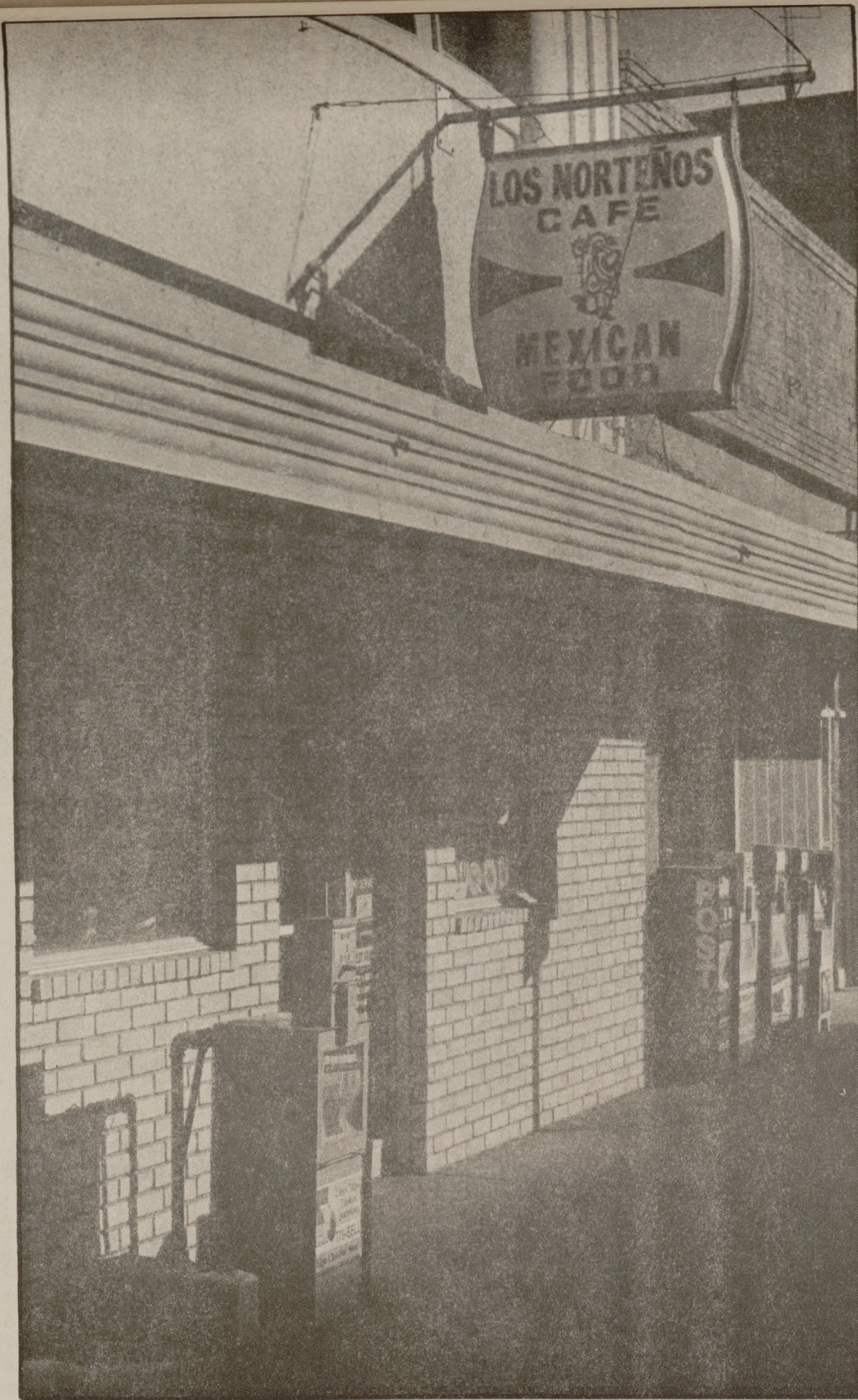
The prices at Los Nortenos are pretty reasonable, and they're open for breakfast, lunch and dinner everyday. Feel free to bring the beverage of your choice—si señor, that means beer—because they don't serve alcohol.

I guess the roughest part about Los Nortenos is the atmosphere, not the food. Atmosphere doesn't mean fancy to me, but it's more than a scruffy black and white tile floor and bright green walls. The diner-quality charm loses something in translation here.

The biggest turn off I got was when I looked up and saw a man with no shoes on at the counter paying his bill. If this was some fast food joint it wouldn't have bothered me. It was just that this is a sit-down restaurant. I could picture Marvin Zindler clutching his chest, and with my ultra-clean upbringing, I clutched mine.

Some of my friends think Los Nortenos is great, food and all. And I respect their opinion, but for this kid the chance that Los Nortenos would be a diamond in the rough has turned out to be nothing but a chunk of coal.

On behalf of Marvin Zindler and my mother, who raised me to be so clean-conscious, I give Los Nortenos a one out of five. □



Shop gives 'prioriteas' to coffee, tea

By WENDY JOHNSON
Staff Writer

Snuggled in a corner of the newly-opened wing of Post Oak Mall is Prioriteas Coffee & Tea Specialty Shop.

Although the shop has a European air, it was not originally styled after a European shop, says owner Mary Newton. She made her first trip to Europe last year.

"I wanted a warm feeling," she says. "I wanted it very inviting and comfortable."

The shop does have a charming aura. Empty burlap coffee sacks and dark wooden apple and tomato crates cover one wall, just above the

small gathering of tables and chairs upholstered in navy and rust chintz. Another wall is stacked with bottles of imported vinegars and oils, jars of jellies and jams, seasonings and spices, and boxes and tins of tea. Yet another wall contains boxes of candies and other sweets, including chocolates from Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, France and a hand-dipped, double-layered Texan variety called Sweet Shop. Baskets hang from the rafters and an antique lamp post stands guard over the barstools and wine rack at the cappuccino bar.

The shop has been in business in other locations for eight years, but two years ago, Newton added the cappuccino bar and restaurant aspect. Still, the shop is an old friend to

many Bryan-College Station residents, whether they stop in for specialty staples, a light lunch of chicken or ham salad on a fresh croissant, quiche or pastries. Prioriteas also designs gift baskets stuffed with imported treats for giving.

Tortes, brownies and nine different types of cheesecake are made fresh daily, though not on the premises.

"I like to support my other local friends in business," Newton grins.

The bar boasts of an espresso machine and "the best and freshest selection of coffees and teas between Houston and Dallas," she says. She stocks sixty varieties of coffee, and loose teas, including herbal and decaffeinated. They will grind the beans and personalize the grind

according to the type of coffee maker you own. If you don't own a coffee maker yet, you will find a selection of them here, including the trendy Krups label. Copper, brass, stainless and pottery tea pots and tea services are available, as well as an Irish coffee warmer and an extensive selection of mugs.

Prices range from 75-cent brownies to \$3 for slices of quiches or cheesecakes. The new location is open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays and 12:30 to 5:30 on Sundays.

Opening in December, on the heels of the new location, will be "Prioriteas Presents 'The Kaffeeklatsch'" in the new Garden District of Bryan, at 108 North Ave., in a quaint Victorian-style house. □