

HEALDSBURG

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*The Diaz
Family*

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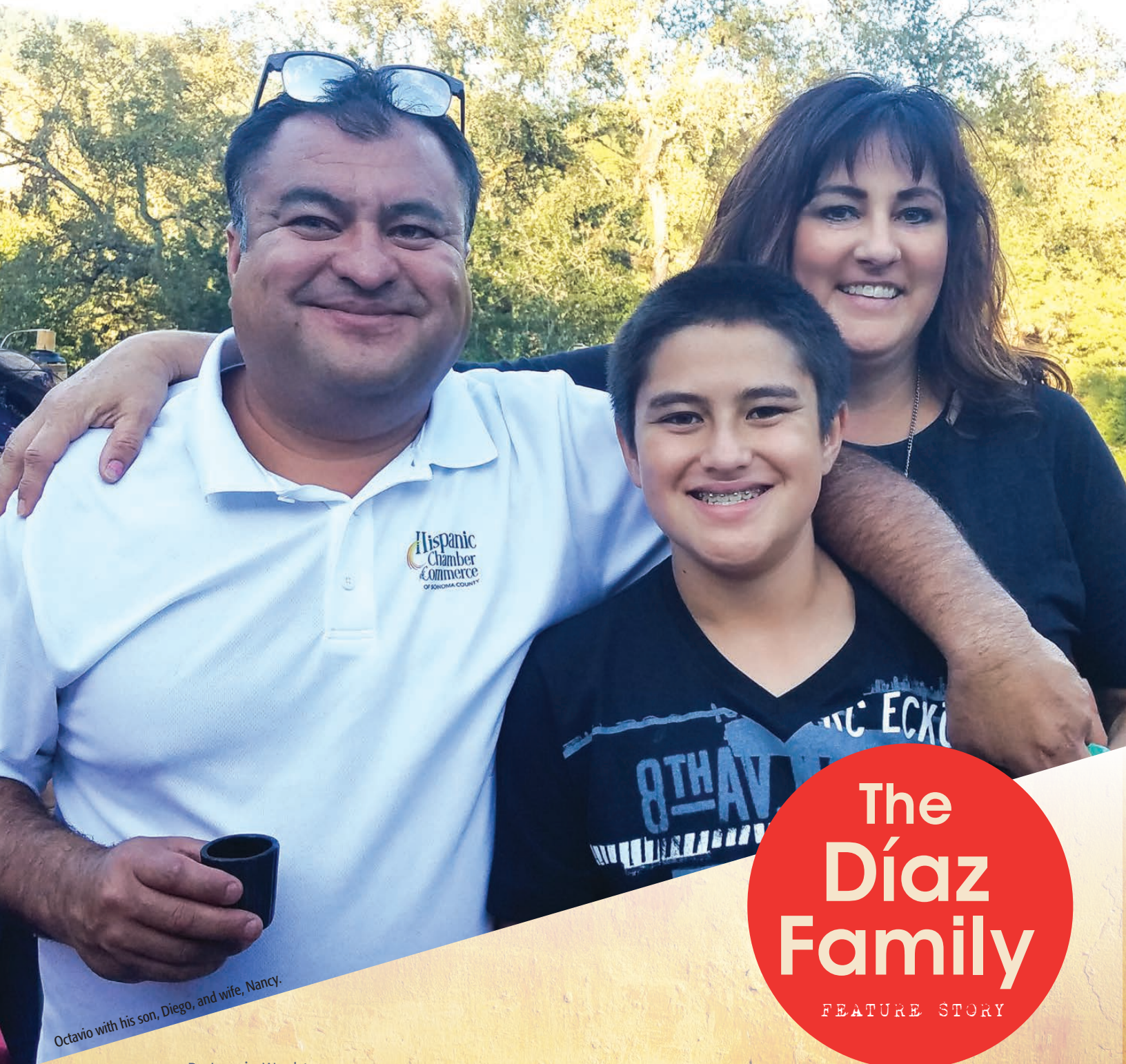
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Cover Photo by Diaz family member, Stephanie Arenas

AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE SERVING THE RESIDENTS OF THE HEALDSBURG PLAZA NEIGHBORHOOD, DRY CREEK VALLEY, GEYSERVILLE TO CHALK HILL & THE SUBURBS OF HEALDSBURG.



Best Version Media



Octavio with his son, Diego, and wife, Nancy.

The Díaz Family

FEATURE STORY

By Laurie Wachter

The Díaz family is part of the heart of Healdsburg, cherished for the marvelous meals they serve in their Healdsburg restaurants and the warmth of their care for patrons, friends and family. Behind that warmth is a lot of hard work and close attention to detail that goes into everything the family does. As the eldest brother, Octavio, says, “We’re trying to build trust. We want people to understand that we are trustworthy people, that you can trust us to cook your meals.”

And Healdsburgers do trust Octavio and Pedro, Jr., two of the five Díaz brothers, by frequenting their two Healdsburg restaurants – El Farolito on Plaza Street, Agave Mexican Restaurant and Tequila Bar in the Vineyard Plaza on Vine Street – and their Mexican supermarket - Casa del Mole Mercado and Carniceria on Center Street.

The family also owns three other restaurants - El Gallo Negro (the Black Rooster) on Old Redwood Highway in Windsor and Agave Uptown in Oakland, which friends who have one foot in Healdsburg and another in Oakland helped them open.

And then there’s “Tu Mole Madre” – which in English translates to “your mother’s Mole,” or, as Octavio puts it, “the mother of moles!” The family opened this “free expression chef’s house” across the parking lot from El Gallo Negro two years ago to honor their parents, Doña Juana and Don Pedro Díaz.

“It’s a small hole in the wall restaurant that lets our Mom work on her mole in more peaceful surroundings,” Octavio explains with a tender smile. This restaurant embodies the dual heart of the Díaz family. On one side is their mother, Juana (relatives call her Chela), and her mole negro de Oaxaca, for which the

family is well known. Chela's mole represents the family's Oaxacan roots and the Mexican tradition of passing down recipes through matrilineal lines. The other side is their father, Pedro, Sr., who died just two years ago, and his approach to life, which is exemplified by his advice to his sons. "Our father told us, 'La Unión es la Fuerza' — 'Unión is Strength.'"

Union has many meanings to the Díaz Family.

The Strength of Family

First and foremost, it is the core value of this hard-working family, in which parents, children, brothers, sisters and cousins work together across the generations to build and run their restaurants. Although Octavio and Pedro, Jr. are the faces of the Díaz Family restaurants, their youngest brother runs the Mercado, and another helps at Agave. And, of course, their mother makes her mole.

The two eldest brothers each own businesses in the Díaz portfolio, and they jointly own one of the family's newest undertakings. They created Mole Díaz Brothers to make their mother's mole available in a jar you can buy at any of their establishments to take home and prepare an Oaxacan dinner of your own design. They aren't focusing on selling it at retailers, as

they prefer to keep their product small batch and handcrafted.

"If another company buys your product," says Octavio, "you don't have control anymore. They take it and run with it, using their marketing and production. Since my dad isn't here anymore, as the eldest in the patriarchal Mexican culture, I have a responsibility to make sure we grow our brand slowly. That way, we can build respect for our product and participate with local farmer's markets and restaurants."

The brothers also have another project, Mitote, in the works in Roseland, where they are converting the old Albertson's into a place where people can come and talk shop and eat. There will be four food trucks with different types of cuisine in a line, and people will choose what they want to eat. The one owned by the Diazes will have ceviche, and their mole, of course. "They have good food in Roseland," says Octavio, "but we want to bring something different." Although the coronavirus has temporarily put things on hold, they hope to get back to the new venture in the next six months.

Everyone in the family works hard, but they also love to spend a lot of time together as a family. They gather at their Mom's house, which is behind Pedro's home on Magnolia Lane by



Octavio

Photos provided by the Díaz Family



Juana, the matriarch and maker of mole.



Geysler Peak Winery. As Octavio says, "When we get together, it's a big fiesta!"

The Díaz family has been in Healdsburg for a long time. The first to migrate to the US was their maternal grandfather, Francisco Ramirez, who worked in various orchards. He arrived as part of the Bracero Program, which brought millions of Mexican guest workers to the United States in the 1940s to early 1960s. The family hails from the small town of Santa Gertrudis in the Valle Central of Oaxaca, Mexico, alongside the rugged Sierra Madre mountains. "It's a very poor state that is driven by tourism. The rest is agriculture." The Díazes source their supply of spices and chiles for the mole from local farmers in Valle Central. "We tried sourcing them in the US, but they just didn't taste right. Our chiles have this unique taste — they're not bitter, they're sweet." How interesting to learn that the flavor of chiles is as influenced by terroir as grapes. "My uncles to this day take care of the land," Octavio adds. "Maybe when I'm older, I can help the local farmers by bringing their produce here for others to buy."

Pedro, Sr. and Chela were still living in Oaxaca when they had their seven children – five boys and two girls. Octavio came to the US when he was 13 to live with his uncle and attend high school and Santa Rosa Junior College, where he studied food and hospitality. That decision meant he didn't return to Oaxaca to care for their land as his parents had planned. Pedro followed six years later, and today, the whole family is in Sonoma County except one sister who married and moved to San Diego.

"We feel very proud that Oaxaca is our roots. We knew our grandparents. We grew up with them, and we keep the values they taught us — to be respectful, only open our mouths in front of older people when we had to, and to work hard. It's different in the US; there's more freedom."

The Strength of Community

Union also means being part of the community.

"Healdsburg and Sonoma County are unique," says Octavio. "People here tend to be long-term visionaries in terms of supporting each other and understanding one another. There



are a lot of old Italian, Portuguese and German families who have been in the country for many years. They are large families, well rooted in Healdsburg and Geyserville. I identify myself with those kinds of people. My family came to this country to work hard. The key is to follow what's in your heart – your passion – not to focus on the money."

"We are proud to be Díaz. We work hard and study local politics to understand what is important to the community.

We are people of heart and soul and, like those old Sonoma County families, also visionaries.

Some families make mistakes that have an impact on future generations. We want to have a positive impact on our children and our community."

One way Octavio does that is to help small businesses thrive by participating in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Sonoma County. "The Hispanic Chamber helped us a lot when we opened Agave," Octavio says. Marcos Suárez, who is the Business Diversity Program Manager at the Economic Development Board of Sonoma County, was the president at that time. "I didn't know a lot about Chambers and what they can do for small businesses, so Marcos suggested that they do some training or sponsor a few events. He and Mo McElroy, who was President of the Healdsburg Chamber, both came to the restaurant and cut the ribbon. I learned so much from Marcos, and he took the Hispanic Chamber to a whole new level, helping make Latino strength in Sonoma County a powerful force. I felt a connection with them, and they helped us big time with our growth process and marketing."

Octavio seeks to do the same for other Latino businesses. "In the Latino community, if you work hard and are successful, sometimes you are criticized by your own people. It's only 1%, not all, but it can create roadblocks you have to get through. It's important to bring this up and help other businesspeople deal with it. Chambers play such an important role with small businesses, especially now, with the coronavirus. They are our voice."

While the shelter-in-place order is in effect, the Díaz brothers




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are working strategically on systems like food-to-go through Grub Hub and Door Dash. They've been offering coaching and counseling for everyone at all their restaurants. They've created a set of goals and the outlook for each restaurant they own. They're also spending a lot of time with their families and cherish the extra time with their kids.

"We'll be ready to open when our customers are ready. COVID is here; we just have to have good processes and be respectful of the people around us. We will be OK if we go into it with a positive attitude. Our people and our staff, they just want to work, so the sooner we get out of this, the better. But we don't need to rush."

The Díazes are community-driven people and positive thinkers. As such, they like to surround themselves with positive customers and people. They see this time as an opportunity to make adjustments, so they are better citizens, residents, members of the community and parents, and to make their restaurants and hospitality better. As Octavio says, "It's an opportunity to take how we make our customers feel to the next level. Hospitality is about our house. We want our customers to leave with a good image in their heads. We always want to do better and better."

Tough times don't last,
But tough people do.



We are here for Healdsburg



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