

Dishing great balls of fire

Back in 1998, a friend told Jessie Myszka to try the pupusas at La Pupusa Guanaca, a Salvadoran restaurant up the street from her JP home. "I'd never had one before," she said.

She's been going back ever since. "Pupusas are *the* fast food of choice," she said. "It's sort of like comfort food."

Start with a doughy ball of cornmeal, make a small hole for filling, stuff it, flatten it out like a pancake, and cook it on the grill: You have a pupusa, a staple in the Salvadoran diet.

At La Pupusa Guanaca, the corn batter and fillings are prepared every morning, and pupusas are served hot with spicy sauce and curtido, a cabbage, carrot, and onion coleslaw. The price is \$1.25 each.

"People like the enchiladas, but the pupusas are the most popular," said Miguel Herrera, a manager at the restaurant. "Latinos order the chicharron pupusas and Americans get the bean and cheese."

Salvadorans travel from as far as Chelsea and East Boston to eat at the establishment, located at 378 Centre St., but most people who come in are repeat customers from the neighborhood.

The main artwork on the restaurant's wall is a large, framed beach towel sent by Herrera's mother from El Salvador. The towel depicts a colorful scene of a Salvadoran village's pupuseria. A woman cooks pupusas on a round grill for a gathering crowd, and her posted menu mirrors the selection at La Pupusa Guanaca.

"The towel is too pretty to use," said Herrera. "Besides, my mother didn't know that it's too cold here to swim."

CARIN ZISSIS