

## Inspired by Texas family recipes, Ms. Gennie's House of Chicken brings southern fare to old Monroe's

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*The roasted chicken plate with cornbread, green chile, rice and beans. Photos by the restaurant.*

Back in rural Texas, Andrew Vela grew up on the hearty comfort food that is southern cuisine. When he moved 800 miles northwest to attend New Mexico Highlands University, he missed the gulf's warm humidity, but most of all his mom's fried chicken.

Skip ahead a few decades to 2020, when Vela brought those family flavors to Albuquerque in the form of [Ms. Gennie's House of Chicken](#), located in the old Monroe's building at Lomas and Sixteenth. The restaurant is run by Vela and his daughter, Drew Lipscomb.

"Ms. Gennie is my grandma - my dad's stepmother, but, you know, we don't use the 'step' title," Lipscomb said. "She was flattered that it was named after her. I don't think she was expecting that at all."

Ms. Gennie still lives in the Bay City area south of Houston, where she once cooked for a young Vela. Although she's now in her nineties, she made the trip to Albuquerque last November to attend the restaurant's grand opening.

Needless to say, it was a challenging year in which to open a restaurant.

"We opened nine days before the [November 2020] shutdown," Lipscomb said. "For many months we were just takeout."

In some ways, however, opening during COVID was easier than opening before it might have been

"We'll never know what it's like to open a restaurant like this *not* in a pandemic," Lipscomb continued. "It kind of presented a lot of obstacles, but I feel like because we weren't already open, we were planning our opening based on the precautions of the pandemic, rather than other restaurants having to change their whole format and the way that they operate."

Those months of takeout gave locals a chance to get to know the Texas-style menu, which replaced the New Mexican cuisine of the former tenant, Monroe's. (Monroe's moved from that location to Fourth and Mountain in late 2019.)

"It's a beautiful space," Lipscomb said of the building, which they redecorated with rustic metal details and "Lone Star" wall hangings. "We got customers familiar with our product, and then by the time we were able to open, people were excited to be able to sit down."

Lipscomb believes that in and of itself is a critical component of the southern hospitality they aim to feature. Fried chicken is often associated with the to-go buckets of fast-food chains, but the House of Chicken hopes to make it a leisurely experience, right through to the cobbler for dessert.

The recipes include a slew of family favorites, all inspired by life back in Texas. There's also a nod to New Mexico in the red and green chile "pour-overs," which diners can order as a side instead of the more traditional white or brown gravy. Beyond that, Vela and Lipscomb didn't want to blend Tex-Mex with New Mexican dishes, focusing instead on classic southern fare.

"We're actually bringing a lot of things from Texas here. I grew up on these Texas-style snow cones served with sweet cream, and we just bought a snow cone machine," Lipscomb added. "It's all very nostalgic, and we're happy to share it."

They're also currently pursuing a beer and wine license, which will clear the way for one more

touch of New Mexico: The drink menu will focus on cans and bottles from producers around Albuquerque.

"We're excited to sell some local beer and wine," Lipscomb said. "We love to support local."

—By *Karie Luidens*

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