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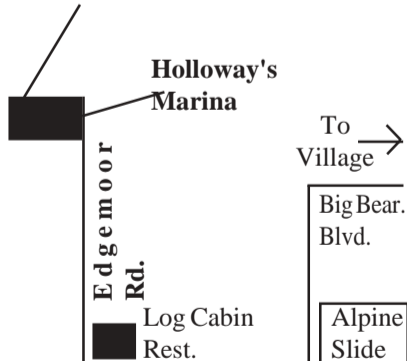


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\$1 tacos add up to big donations at Sonora Cantina

Wow, do those dollar tacos really add up!

During spring and fall Sonora Cantina holds dollar taco nights for charity each Monday. Which charity? Doesn't matter. Any group that wants to hold a dollar taco fundraiser can do so just by setting a date with owner Maria Rojas. All the charity has to do is get folks out to devour large quantities of delicious dollar tacos; Sonora Cantina donates back every dollar from every taco back to the group.

Simple concept, big results. In 2007 Sonora Cantina sold a whopping \$15,000 for local groups and last year increased it 50% to around 23,000 tacos. Similar story in 2009, and now the second half of taco



Sizzling, savory, shrimp-laden fajitas at Sonora Cantina

season is upon us with fall's arrival.

That's many thousands of dollars to charity in the past couple years, all through what Maria says is the power of the taco. "You don't think of a dollar taco as being a big deal, but they add up," Rojas says.

Typical nights see Sonora Cantina served between 500 and 1,500 tacos, but one night that number shot to 3,500. "We had no idea that would happen and ran out of meat and tortillas, so I had to go to the store," Rojas says.

Then last year, the Rojas family—Maria,

husband Gabriel, daughters Erika, Amy and Maritza, purchased Old Country Inn restaurant next door. Instead of tacos, OCI does Thursday spaghetti nights, full meals priced at just \$5.99 with proceeds going to the evening's charity.

Fall Taco Season is already filling with groups holding \$1 taco nights most Mondays from Sept. 13 (Miss Big Bear Pageant) to high school basketball team on December 6. In between there's Realtor Can-Tree project (Sept. 27), park and rec soccer (October 18), high school girls basketball (Oct. 25), park and rec dance studio (Nov. 1) and high school soccer (Nov. 15).

Spaghetti at OCI meanwhile is on Sept. 2 (Miss Big Bear), 9 (park and rec soccer), 16 (Believer's Chapel Food Pantry), 23 (Chautauqua) and 30 (park and rec dance studio). "We help anybody in the Valley that needs help," Maria says. "I cannot say no to anyone. It feels good to be able to help. Tacos do a lot of good."

Sonora Cantina is known for more than taco fundraisers. Just about everyone has heard of the Big Juan burrito, said to be the biggest in the world and a full plate of goodness. Stuffed with four different meats, cheese, beans and rice, it weighs a whopping five pounds! Those who finish one in 45 minutes or less achieve celebrity status and proclaim their triumph with a free T-shirt. Most are content to split one as an inexpensive meal for two.

The menu is as large as the Big Juan. Naturally there's the usual Mexican combination plates but also a wide selection of carne asada and shrimp offerings too, plus breakfast dishes like huevos rancheros, machaca and chorizo and eggs served all day. Fajitas are tasty, with grilled shrimp, steak or chicken teamed with onions, all the peppers in the rainbow and secret seasonings, served in a sizzling cast iron pan.

Sonora Cantina is at 41144 Big Bear Blvd. next to Old Country Inn. 866-8202.



The famous Big Juan burrito fills a plate

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