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CITY, COUNTY OFFICIALS BREAK BREAD

CEREMONY MARKED OPENING OF MILWAUKEE'S FIRST COLOMBIAN BAKERY

Neighborhood residents joined with Mayor Tom Barrett, County Executive Scott Walker, Alderman Robert Donovan, County Supervisor Marina Dimitrijevic and other community leaders to celebrate the transformation of a nuisance building into Milwaukee's first Colombian bakery. A bread-cutting ceremony marked the grand opening of Mekato's Colombian Bakery & Café, 3500 W. National Avenue.

“Family-owned businesses are what make Milwaukee an exciting place to visit or live, as you will find our neighborhoods are influenced by many cultures and ethnicities,” said Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. “Mekato’s Colombian Bakery & Café is a success story in the mission to create jobs and economic vitality in our neighborhood main streets.”

Mekato’s occupies what was once a blighted building on the highly visible corner of 35th and National Avenue. Long the source of neighborhood complaints, the building housed several different bars over the years. Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Inc. (LBWN) worked with many partners, including the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County to acquire the property and turn the blight into a neighborhood attraction. The two-story, mixed-use building underwent extensive renovations in both the commercial space on the first floor and the two residences upstairs. New facades, signage, lighting, planters, and a well-lit outdoor dining patio were all added.

The building was renovated according to the vision created by the Bohorquez family, owners of Mekato’s Colombian Bakery & Café. Originally from Colombia, John Bohorquez, Sr. previously owned a similar bakery in Chicago with his wife Martha and his two sons John Jr. and Bryan. In their new location in Milwaukee, the family installed traditional Colombian art on the walls and hired nine employees to help launch the business. Additional employees will be added as Mekato’s expands into the wholesale market to local grocery stores. Mekato’s offers Milwaukeeans the chance to try not only traditional Colombian bakery such as arepas and palito de queso, but to enjoy an entire meal from the many Colombian foods available at the café.

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Inc. Executive Director Charlotte John-Gomez said the change on 35th and National Avenue will serve as a welcoming gateway for the nearly 45,000 people that travel the intersection daily.

“The complete renovation and the recruitment of Mekato's to this mixed-use building has already injected new energy into our neighborhood revitalization efforts,” said John-Gomez.

Mekato’s is the eleventh new business to open in the Silver City Main Street District, one of four commercial streets targeted for renewal under the Main Street Milwaukee Program.

"This is exactly what the Main Street Milwaukee program is about, bringing new businesses to commercial districts that both serve the neighborhood and attract new people to the Silver City District," said Silver City Main Street District Manager Helen Hermus. "We are glad to have Mekato's join us."

The renovation of 3500 W. National Ave was made possible by a \$150,000 grant from the City of Milwaukee and \$100,000 HOLF Loan from Milwaukee County. Other investing partners include Lincoln State Bank, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and the Helen Bader Foundation.

"I welcome Mekato's Bakery to our neighborhood and wish them continued success," said Milwaukee County Supervisor Marina Dimitrijevic. "This well-run business provides authentic Colombian cooking and adds to the already thriving and diverse Silver City Business District. I am pleased that Milwaukee County was able to provide funds to help make this important day happen."

"By focusing our efforts on working cooperatively with neighborhood organizations, we can create an excellent environment for economic development and job growth," said Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker. "I am very pleased that the County's no-interest loan has helped Mekato's to revitalize the neighborhood and create needed jobs."

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