

Cuban food truck drives business to 'brick-and-mortar' restaurant

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Alex Menendez (left) and Jose Lorenzo are co-owners of Habana Hemingway Cafe. Here they stand in front of one of Lorenzo's many paintings in Habana Hemingway Cafe. (Andrew Harris/WYDaily)

Cuban immigrant Jose Lorenzo opened his own restaurant in York County in January.

Now he's launched a food truck to deliver his Cuban-inspired cuisine to hungry stomachs all over town.

Customers who stop in Habana Hemingway Café in McLaws Circle can sample some of Lorenzo's American-Cuban fusion while they admire his artwork, which is plastered on nearly every wall and table in the restaurant.

With his new Habana Hemingway Food Truck, Lorenzo said he can take his kitchen on wheels and give the community a taste of the restaurant, like the Cuban sandwich, plantains, lechon, grilled steak and pollo habanero.

“I think the food truck industry is growing so big,” Lorenzo said. “Now instead of people coming to me, I can go to the people.”

He said he has visited private events at Busch Gardens, Billsburg Brewery and Virginia Beer Company. Each Tuesday through Friday Lorenzo is at Fort Eustis for lunch and he also serves lunch at the Offices at NetCenter in Hampton on Mondays.

With the food truck’s lower overhead Lorenzo said it’s been easier to turn a profit than in his restaurant. He also thinks his food truck is driving his restaurant’s success.

“The food truck helps, big time, advertise the restaurant, better than any magazine” Lorenzo said. “People come to the truck and say, ‘Hey man, this is good.’ I say, ‘Come to the restaurant.’ That’s it. You got one more client for the restaurant.”

He said his truck has done so well he’ll be launching a second in early 2019. He expects the second truck will often visit area breweries.



Just as Lorenzo paints the walls of his restaurant, he made his food truck himself. He said he came up with the design, and took the seats out of a small bus for the foundation of his mobile kitchen.

He hired an electrician to rig his kitchen and then passed inspections by the health department. Lorenzo also designed and built The Hungry Pug's truck.

"I believe it's better because it has better insulation, it's easy to clean and it's more modern," Lorenzo said. "It's more aerodynamic. When you're driving it's not wiggling."

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