



Honey Bee Market

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY FOR TAMMY ALFARO-KOEHLER, AT THIS MEXICANTOWN FAVORITE

Photos and Story by Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

A Family Business

“Honey Bee Market began in 1956 with my grandparents. They were immigrants from Mexico, and back then, the market was a multi-use building: a little store on the bottom and a flat up above. After my grandparents, my dad took it over with some of his siblings, but unfortunately, my dad passed away young at age 50 in 1981 when I was 13 years old. When he passed, my mom took over, and I started running the store after graduating from college in 1993. Then I met my husband, Ken, and he and I purchased it in 1996.

We had a vision when we bought the store to make it bigger.

At the time, there was nothing here in this part of Mexicantown. There was, I think, one single white house on 16th Street, but it was empty all the way to Lafayette. Our parking lot was vacant land. But it was our dream to make something bigger that we could offer something more to the community.

What makes an independent grocer different is that the customer care is more personal. I know for myself, living down the street, it's nice to be able to come in here daily to just get a few things. You get to see the same faces all the time and get to know them. Our employees know everybody's names, their families, and what they like to buy.

It's about creating an environment that feels like home. That's the difference between a big chain and an independent chain: it feels like home.

It really has taken a village to make Honey Bee successful. I'm thankful for everybody who has worked here, whether it's for a short time or a long time, because it takes a lot of work and people to put this all together. During this pandemic, we had a lot of people stick things out even though they could leave. It's all of us working together.

I love Mexicantown because it's my home. I've been here my whole life. I like the feel of the community. A lot of the business owners, we help each other when we're feeling discouraged, help each other find new products, we exchange things. I know a lot of people from the community, and I just really like the history that comes with so many generations of families being here. There are many grandparents and great-grandparents who still live here, and their great-grandchildren come and visit them. There are a lot of longtime residents here and so many people who care about this place."

- Tammy Alfaro-Koehler, owner of Honey Bee Market, Mexicantown



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