

# The Hidden “Jewel” of Charlottesville

Jane Monaghan, staff writer

Nestled between Ann’s Nails and a Domino’s Pizza in a line of brick storefronts, La Joya seems unimpressive at first glance. Often empty, with wall-mounted televisions that only play programs in Spanish, La Joya is little more than a hole-in-the-wall in Charlottesville’s food scene. But don’t let the Corona beer ads, pinatas, and plastic-covered tables fool you into thinking this restaurant is tacky. In my opinion, La Joya’s fare is the tastiest and most authentic Mexican food in Charlottesville, and all for prices that barely reach \$14.

Even after upwards of ten visits to La Joya, I am never bored by their food. From their cheesy and crispy Chimichangas (\$12) to the spicy Verdes Enchiladas (\$10) that I always finish too quickly, the staff at La Joya make sure there is always something new to try, and it is always something good.

Besides the large, varied, and delicious entrée menu, La Joya provides heaping plates of Mexican rice and beans, which are good for sides, leftovers, and midnight snacks. There are no boundaries between foods in Mexican cuisine;



Photography by Jane Monaghan

everything goes well with everything, so don’t be afraid to swap or share dishes if you’re eating with friends. Additionally, La Joya offers a vegetarian menu, and the choice between corn and flour tortillas makes it easy to go gluten-free; they ask that allergy concerns be brought to the server’s attention before ordering.

La Joya’s location may not be glamorous, but it is easy to find. The Willoughby Square Shopping Center is behind 5<sup>th</sup> Street Station, and the short drive from PVCC is worth it, to me. My dad has no trouble driving up to the entrance to drop off my grandfather, the staff are always courteous, and best of all, the cooks are extremely speedy, so food is always served promptly.

La Joya is located at 1145 5th St SW in the Willoughby Square Shopping Center, and is open from 10:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. on most days, with the exception of Friday (10:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.) and Sunday (10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.). Prices rarely exceed \$16, and many dishes are under \$10.



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