



VILLARREAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISES

ENDEAVORS IN PROGRESS

Food, Culture, and Community: The Story of Yesenia Ramirez

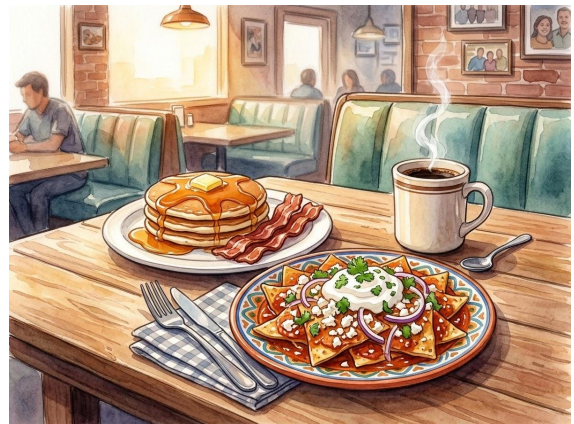
How one Mexican-born entrepreneur combined culinary traditions, professional experience, and entrepreneurship to build community in Pasadena, California.

Essential Question

How can food, entrepreneurship, and cultural traditions help strengthen a community?

A neighborhood restaurant can become much more than a place to eat. Over time, it can become a place where people meet, families create memories, neighbors become friends, and a community finds a sense of belonging.

In Pasadena, California, **Andy's Coffee Shop** has become one of those places. At the center of its story today is **Yesenia Ramirez**, whose journey from Mexico to California led her through the hospitality industry, culinary education, and eventually restaurant ownership.



Her story also shows how food can connect different cultures while helping preserve the traditions we bring with us.

From Mexico to California

Yesenia Ramirez's cultural roots reach into **Mexico City and the Yucatán Peninsula**. When she migrated to the United States, she brought more than her hopes for a new life. She also brought cultural traditions, family memories, and a connection to Mexican food.

Yesenia built her career in the food service and hospitality industry. Her professional experience included working with large hotels and providing food service for major events. These experiences taught her the importance of preparation, teamwork, organization, and hospitality—the skills needed to serve large numbers of people successfully (Ramirez, personal communication, 2019).



She continued developing her skills through formal culinary education at **Los Angeles Trade-Technical College**, where she studied Culinary Arts. The college's Culinary Arts program prepares students for professional culinary, supervisory, and management positions and emphasizes professional culinary techniques and industry standards (Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, n.d.).

Yesenia also received a Bristol Farms scholarship and earned recognition in regional culinary competitions. Her accomplishments included second place in the Orange County Culinary Competition and third place in the Los Angeles Culinary Competition.

Her career eventually led to an opportunity to become an owner of Andy's Coffee Shop.

Continuing a Pasadena Tradition

Andy's Coffee Shop has been part of Pasadena's history for decades. Located on Colorado Boulevard along historic Route 66, the restaurant has maintained the atmosphere of a traditional American diner. Visit Pasadena describes Andy's as an iconic roadside restaurant whose classic menu includes both American and Mexican breakfast dishes (Visit Pasadena, n.d.).

The diner remains very much alive.

Customers can still enjoy familiar diner favorites such as eggs, pancakes, omelets, sandwiches, and other traditional American dishes. But Yesenia has also brought her own culinary background to the restaurant.

Her knowledge of Mexican cuisine has allowed her to add dishes such as **chilaquiles, huevos rancheros, huevos a la Mexicana, machaca, chorizo and eggs, chile verde, and nopales** to Andy's offerings.

This combination is important. Yesenia did not have to abandon the traditional diner to bring her culture into the restaurant. Instead, she added her own experiences and culinary traditions to a place with its own history.

The result is a restaurant where different culinary traditions can share the same menu.

This is part of the story of food in California. Cultures meet, traditions are preserved, and new traditions develop from those connections.

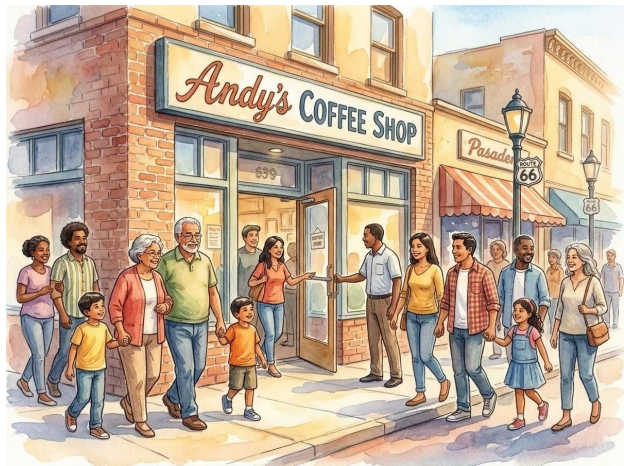
Food as Cultural Connection

For Yesenia, the connection between food and culture goes beyond the menu at Andy's.

In 2025, she participated as a guest chef in a culinary program at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes, where she demonstrated how to prepare **Yucatecan-style cochinita pibil tamales**. The program connected tamale-making with family memories and the preservation of cultural traditions.

Food can carry memories across generations and across borders.

A recipe can connect people to their grandparents. A familiar flavor can remind someone of home. Preparing traditional food can help younger generations understand where their families came from. Sharing that food with others can also introduce people to a culture they may not otherwise experience.



For someone with roots in Mexico City and the Yucatán Peninsula, food can therefore become a bridge between past and present.

When a Business Becomes a Community

Andy's story is also a story about the relationship between a small business and its community.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Andy's faced many of the challenges experienced by small restaurants throughout the country. Yesenia reduced her staff dramatically and, at one point, worked alongside her daughter and a cook to keep the restaurant operating.

The community responded.

Customers helped install protective barriers, assisted the restaurant with digital food-delivery platforms, and continued supporting Andy's through takeout and its dinner program. The Pasadena Community Foundation described Andy's as a longstanding **community hub** and reported that customer support was extremely important to Yesenia during this difficult period (Pasadena Community Foundation, 2021).

The experience showed that a restaurant can have a relationship with its community that goes beyond buying and selling food.

A restaurant serves its community, but over time, the community can also become part of the life of the restaurant.

Entrepreneurship and Representation

She is a woman who migrated from Mexico and built a professional career in California. She developed her skills through education and experience and eventually became a business owner.

Her story is also part of the larger story of Latino entrepreneurship. Visit Pasadena identifies Andy's Coffee Shop as both **Latino-owned and woman-owned** (Visit Pasadena, n.d.).



Representation matters because communities are strengthened when people can see themselves as creators, professionals, business owners, chefs, and leaders.

Yesenia's story demonstrates that success does not always mean leaving your culture behind. Sometimes success means finding ways to carry your culture forward while becoming part of something new.

Nourishing a Community

Chef and humanitarian **José Andrés** has written about the power of food to bring people together and remind us where we come from. He has described food as something that can help feed communities and emphasized the responsibility of people in the food industry to help nourish others (Andrés, 2014).

That idea connects closely with Yesenia's story.

At Andy's, people can order a traditional U.S. diner style breakfast or enjoy a dish rooted in Mexican culinary traditions. They can sit at the counter, share a table with family, meet a friend, or simply enjoy a meal.

The food may be what brings people through the door, but community is what makes a place meaningful.

Yesenia Ramirez's story reminds us that entrepreneurship can be about more than building a successful business. It can also be about building a place where people feel welcome, where culture can be shared, and where a community can come together around a table.

And sometimes, a plate of food can nourish much more than the body. It can nourish **memory, culture, relationships, and community.**

References

Andrés, J. (2014, April 15). *The power of food*. National Geographic. [National Geographic](#)

Los Angeles Trade-Technical College. (n.d.). *Culinary Arts*. Los Angeles Community College District. [Los Angeles Trade-Technical College Culinary Arts](#)

Pasadena Community Foundation. (2021). *Microgrant program supports small business owners*. [Pasadena Community Foundation](#)

Visit Pasadena. (n.d.). *Andy's Coffee Shop*. [Visit Pasadena – Andy's Coffee Shop](#)

Note: Information provided directly by Yesenia Ramirez is cited in the text as personal communication. Under APA 7th edition guidelines, personal communications are not included in the reference list because they are not recoverable sources.

Discussion Questions

1. Understanding — Identify

What experiences helped Yesenia Ramirez develop the skills she needed to become a restaurant owner?

Use at least **two examples** from the reading to support your response.

2. Analyzing — Examine

How does Yesenia’s approach to Andy’s Coffee Shop demonstrate that cultural traditions do not have to disappear when people enter a new community?

Use examples from the restaurant’s menu and Yesenia’s culinary background in your response.

3. Applying — Connect

Think about a food, recipe, or culinary tradition that is important to your family or community. How could sharing that tradition with others help people understand or appreciate your culture?

4. Evaluating — Judge

The reading states that “a restaurant serves its community, but over time, the community can also become part of the life of the restaurant.” Do you agree with this idea?

Use evidence from Yesenia’s experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to explain your reasoning.

5. Creating/Synthesizing — Develop

Based on Yesenia Ramirez’s story, what makes a business more than simply a place where people buy something?

Develop a response that explains how **entrepreneurship, culture, food, and community** can work together to strengthen a neighborhood.