



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Your Success Story and Lessons Learned

Success Story- Rio Meat Market & Restaurant

Access to healthy food is a challenge for those that live, work, and learn in Northwest Pasadena, which is considered a low-income food desert. Consequently, low-income communities are at a higher risk of becoming overweight due to poorer food choices and limited access to fresh produce and healthier options. Healthy food options in Northwest Pasadena are limited and this health inequality is exemplified through the abundance of corner stores to large grocery stores in the area. Many of these corner stores are nestled near residential areas and residents have come to rely on these establishments for their fresh produce shopping and other household necessities. Fresh produce is far from what many of these residents find here. Local youth also gravitate to these stores in search for a quick snack, since they know they'll find candy, chips and soda.

Esthela Borja, store owner of Rio Meat Market & Restaurant, is a Champion because she has turned a once dilapidated store into a safe, clean, healthier outlet to shop and eat for the Northwest Pasadena community. Esthela has demonstrated commitment and leadership from the very beginning. In March of 2013, the Pasadena Public Health Department (PPHD) NEOP team conducted the CX³ assessment at select retail locations. Results were received from the CA Department of Public Health (CDPH) in the summer of 2014. At that time of the assessment, Montana Meat Market, now named Rio Meat Market & Restaurant, received a score of 32.5 out of 100 points, indicating that the market could benefit from additional resources and assistance from the Healthy Retail program.

When Esthela became owner of Rio Meat Market & Restaurant in June of 2014, she had a vision of creating a friendly, community store for residents to feel welcomed. Rio Meat Market & Restaurant's layout is unique because it also houses a small sit down restaurant. Since the market is located in a food desert near the Pasadena's Boys and Girls Club, Head Start, John Muir High School, Washington Middle School, ChapCare Clinic, and the Pasadena Public Health Department, Esthela understood the importance of addressing her community's need for better, healthier food options. She made changes on her own by repainting the store's façade and improving the interior. These small and quickly executed changes illustrate Esthela's leadership, motivation, and business savviness. When the NEOP team heard about the change in ownership and visited the store, they saw a huge transformation and immediately wanted to work with Esthela to create a healthier store. Esthela has a genuine enthusiasm and vested interest in the Northwest Pasadena community, and she clearly demonstrates passion and dedication to her customers.

It takes a village to make changes. Esthela and the Pasadena NEOP team enlisted the help of important partners in the process of transforming Rio Market & Restaurant. Pasadena Flintridge Center, Pasadena Youth Build, and Day One assisted Esthela in changing the layout of the store to create a better flow, rearranging products in the refrigeration and shelving units to have more healthy items at eye-level, and cleaning and organizing goods on the shelf. Los Angeles Public Health Department NEOP retail analyst,

Brenda Smith, provided Esthela with expertise, guidance, and resources through their Healthy Retail program. Ruth Martinez from the Pasadena's Economic Development Department provided technical assistance and knowledge about the business and marketing plan. Other improvements that the NEOP team assisted with include an improved produce section with higher quality, more varied produce, signage with healthy messaging, and healthy food shelf-talkers. At the Grand Opening, which took place in March of 2015, Mayor Bill Bogaard, Vice Mayor Jacque Robinson, and Pasadena Public Health Officer Dr. Goh spoke to celebrate Rio Meat Market & Restaurant's transformation and Esthela's efforts in providing healthier food options in Northwest Pasadena. City Councilmembers and the Northwest Commission were among the many dignitaries present. A healthy retail video vignette was created by the Training Resource Center as part of a campaign to highlight the efforts and changes Esthela has made and to encourage retail outlets to promote healthy products and lifestyle.

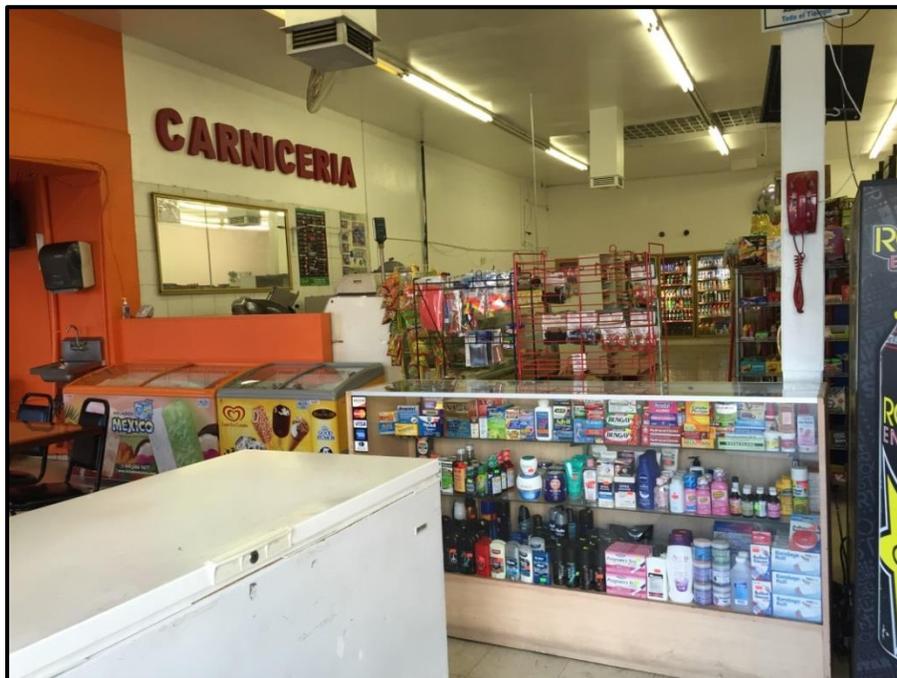
Since the Grand Opening, Esthela's customer base has increased and she has sustained many of the changes. The NEOP team continues to maintain a relationship with Esthela and assist her in any questions or resources she may need. The NEOP team will be conducting customer surveys at her store and the surrounding area to see what other healthy options customers would like to see at the store, as well as hosting nutrition classes there. The changes made at Rio Meat Market & Restaurant and Esthela's commitment to change serves as a model for the abundant number of corner stores in Northwest Pasadena.



Pictured above: Produce section at Rio Meat Market & Restaurant before Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Restaurant area at Rio Meat Market & Restaurant before Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Inside main entrance to Rio Meat Market & Restaurant before Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Store layout before Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Organization of food on shelf before Healthy Retail Program



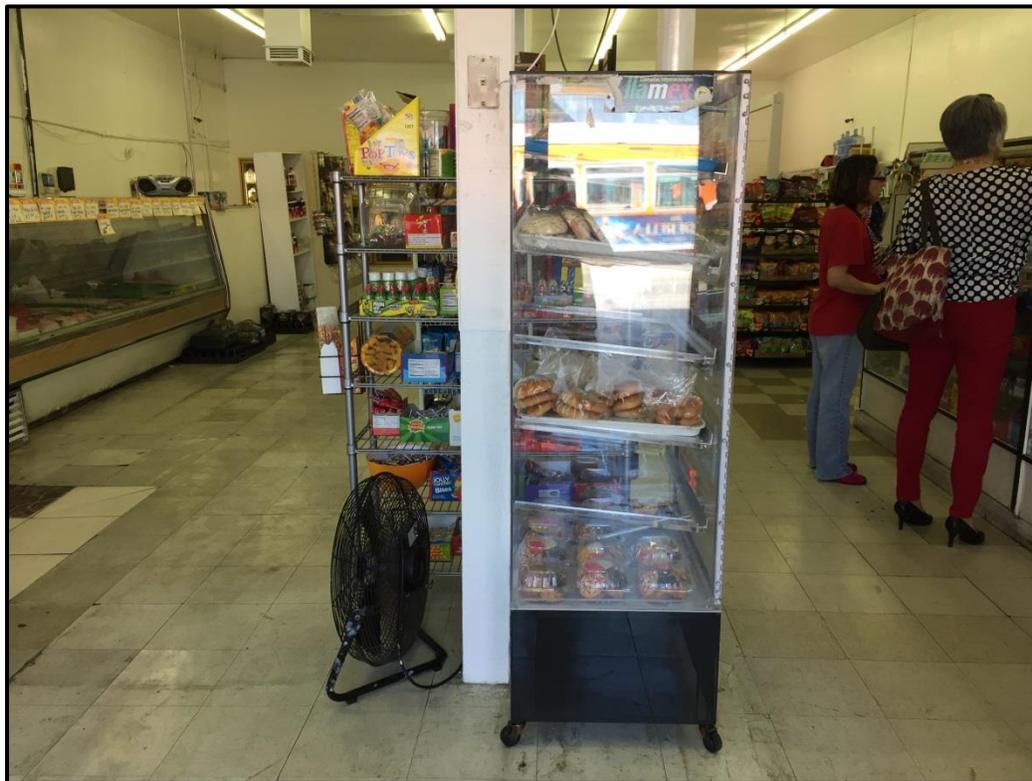
Pictured above: Volunteer Work Day



Pictured above: Volunteers reorganizing the food on the shelves



Pictured above: Volunteers group photo



Pictured above: Store layout after Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Healthier food items at eye-level after Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Produce after Healthy Retail Program



Pictured above: Store becomes WIC approved



Pictured above: Healthy food shelf-talkers



Pictured above: New menu



Pictured above: Grand Opening flyer



Pictured above: Rio Meat Market & Restaurant Grand Opening (March 21, 2015)



Pictured above (left to right): Pasadena Public Health Department Health Officer Esthela Dr. Goh, Rio Meat Market & Restaurant Esthela Borja, Vice-Mayor Jacque Robinson, Mayor Bill Bogaard



Pictured above (left to right): Pasadena NEOP Judith Dunaway (with her son), Pasadena NEOP Mary Urtecho-Garcia, Esthela Borja, Pasadena NEOP Esme Garcia, Pasadena NEOP Erika Redke, Pasadena NEOP Melany Chan

Contact information about this Narrative

Local Health Department Grant Name: City of Pasadena Public Health Department

Grant #: 13-20496

Author's Name: Melany Chan

Phone: (626) 744-6136

Email: mchan@cityofpasadena.net

This material was produced by the California Department of Public Health's Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch with funding from USDA SNAP-Ed, known in California as CalFresh. These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. CalFresh provides assistance to low-income households and can help buy nutritious food for better health. For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. For important nutrition information, visit www.CaChampionsForChange.net.