

# Vatos Tacos headed to The Foundry in downtown Loveland

Construction on two previously announced restaurants starting soon



Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald

Chef Clay Caldwell, owner of Mo' Betta Gumbo, left, and his executive chef, Sean Keefer, talk Monday about plans for the new space for the restaurant at The Foundry in downtown Loveland.

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The developer of The Foundry, downtown Loveland's major redevelopment project, announced Monday that it had signed a Mexican restaurant for a plaza-facing retail space.

Vatos Tacos and Tequila, which has had a successful "test drive" in The Exchange development in Old Town Fort Collins, will fill a 3,740-square-foot space at the north end of the Cleveland Avenue building in The Foundry, according to Jay Hardy, president of developer Brinkman.

Hardy also announced that construction would start this week on the north end cap of the Lincoln Avenue building, which will become the new 3,700-square-foot [home of Mo' Betta Gumbo](#), the Southern-style restaurant that has made a name for itself a couple of blocks away at Fourth Street and Cleveland Avenue.

Construction on the 2,000-square-foot [Colorado Coffee & Café restaurant](#) on the Cleveland side will start next week, Hardy said, with the work estimated to be finished by Jan. 31 for both Mo' Betta and Colorado Coffee.

Construction inside Vatos Tacos should start Dec. 23 and be complete by Feb. 28, he said.

"We're finally getting to the vision of what we anticipated," Hardy said Monday. "It's a little bit later than what we thought, but we're super-excited about the mix that we have."

"We believed strongly that a good, solid Mexican concept was really important in this development," he said.

Vatos Tacos and Tequila specializes in street tacos, burritos, margaritas, tequila and Mexican beer at its Fort Collins location, open since 2018 at 200 N. College Ave.

Owner Richard Lucio, who wasn't available for comment Monday, has established several other successful Mexican and Southwestern restaurants in Northern Colorado over the past 30 years, Hardy said. Lucio owns Vatos Tacos, the Blue Agave Grill in Fort Collins and Denver, the Palomino Mexican Restaurant in east Loveland and Coyotes Southwestern Grill in Greeley.

"What we're excited about is the fact that Richard's a proven operator in this area," Hardy said.

The recently signed lease means The Foundry's 15,000-square-foot commercial space is 61 percent leased, Hardy said. The Cleveland building has just one 1,100-square-foot piece left, between Colorado Coffee & Café and the new Vatos Tacos.

Meanwhile, the owner and the executive chef at Mo' Betta Gumbo walked through their new space in The Foundry on Monday in anticipation of the start of construction the next day.

Owner Clay Caldwell brought on chef Sean Keefer this summer to help the restaurant scale up its operation for the new, much larger space.

"He can handle the volume," Caldwell said of Keefer, who spent several years as a sous-chef in large casino restaurants in Las Vegas.

Keefer, who was trained at the Culinary School of the Rockies in Boulder, said he and Caldwell have been drawing out plans and walking the new, blank space as they "lay everything out and then rework it."

"Things have turned around eight or nine times," he said.

The two have talked about how they will expand Mo' Betta's menu once they have room for the equipment to cook new offerings — equipment such as a tilt skillet and a grill.

"Working in the casinos and the bigger restaurants in Las Vegas ... I had closets in the casinos bigger than our current kitchen space," Keefer said. The kitchen at 141 E. Fourth St. is less than 200 square feet, and the new one will be 1,000, he said.

Caldwell said the new location will allow him to build bathrooms with two stalls each, add two dishwashers (his staff washes dishes by hand now) and install a 32-foot-long range hood (the current hood is 4 feet long).

The new location will require a larger staff, Keefer said.

"We're putting some feelers out. We're trying to grab the good talent that's around in Northern Colorado," he said.