

NACUFS (2025)

Retail Sales: Single Concept of the Year

Cantina Rio

Jacksonville University

Introduction:

This concept was the product of a retail space rebrand that was driven by student engagement surveys seeking Latin/Tex-Mex food. The Cantina Rio was born. Meaning “River Bar,” it is situated in the River House on Jacksonville University campus overlooking the St. John’s River. The menu features creations inspired by the city of Jacksonville and university themes. The JU Student Affairs Department was consulted on the final menu and execution. The beers on draft are all from breweries local to Jacksonville.

Essay:

The menu is attached and takes inspiration from established Tex-Mex tenets including burritos, tacos, and nachos while also including “River Bar” food such as wings and chicken tenders. Anyone familiar with Duval County (where JU is located) knows the established “Duuuuuval” chant. One of the most popular tacos, the Duuval Chicken, is named for this Jacksonville cry. The Phin Phever taco was inspired by the school’s identity of dolphins. Using the school’s color of green for its design, this taco is an all-green blend of chicken, guacamole, lettuce and topped with salsa verde and fresh jalapeños. Students on an unlimited meal plan have a dedicated menu to choose from that is also available via Grubhub for mobile ordering. All fresh produce is prepared in house. Build guides, station layouts, and production sheets were designed and implemented by the location leadership. Limited time specials are not featured on the paper menu, but have included churros, nacho fries, and a discounted wing/tender platter for certain sporting events.

Introduction:

Since the River House's repurposing from the presidential residence to an event space and restaurant location, it has been a popular alumni meeting place. The previous pub concept had beer mugs etched with alumni names and years hang above the bar. While transitioning to Cantina Rio, an effort was made to pair the history of the space with more modern touches, such as neon lights, providing an environment that feels new but familiar to those returning. Guests can relax inside or enjoy the deck which overlooks the St. John's River.

Essay:

The flow of the restaurant has a laid-back feel. Two retractable garage doors are raised on balmy days to offer an open-air experience and atmosphere of relaxation. Once an order is placed at the counter, guests take a pager and sit at any table they desire with their drinks. Upon returning, they pick up their food on dinnerware that matches the colors of the logo and décor. Those who choose the "to-go" option have modern styled black boxes or a compostable bowl as packaging. In the same vein as other fast casual restaurants, patrons can return their dishes at a drop-off. The dish presentations were created by the executive chef on campus to be visually appealing but also true to the cuisine's roots. Freshly fried tri-colored tortilla chips and salsa accompany any meal orders as the Tex Mex staple.

Introduction:

The logo design was original and features a take on "calaveras," a traditional Mexican representation of a human skull. There are numerous references to Jacksonville and the surrounding area within the logo. The menu is available online via Grubhub or in the store with specials being showcased on social media and the chalkboards inside. Signage in the restaurant is consistent with allergen and consumer advisories as well as a QR code for customer feedback. Sales data and feedback are used to determine if specials should become part of the regular menu.

Essay:

Within the logo is the area code for Jacksonville (904) as well as the city skyline which is reflected in the sunglasses. Aviator style sunglasses were chosen as an ode to the prominent Navy ROTC program on campus and NAS Jax, which is a naval base located nearby. Two large chalkboards are decorated by student employees who use them to highlight new specials, tie into current holiday, or offer words of encouragement as midterms or finals approach. The local minor league team, the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp, have partnered with the location and in addition to having the mascot at certain events (ex. Trivia nights) also have featured décor. When JU athletics, Dolphin Culinary Group, and a local brewery named Strings partnered to create a JU specific beer called "Phins Up," it was added to the draft list with signage promoting it to patrons. "Tacos and Trivia" features the BOGO Taco Tuesday special in conjunction with trivia hosted by a well-known local trivia host (Mike Myers: I Host, and I Know Things). Winning teams split prize pools of the dining currency, Flex Bucks.

Introduction:

There is signage spread throughout the location including an allergen and consumer advisory. Caloric counts are available via the paper menu as well as the online in Grubhub. Items are often modified to accommodate dietary preferences. Select items are identified with symbols on the menu to indicate if they are made without gluten or vegan.

Essay:

A well-balanced menu was imperative in the creation of Cantina Rio. Salads are offered on both the regular menu as well as meal exchange. Some restaurants create vegetarian/vegan dishes simply by omitting the animal protein instead of having an intentionally designed vegetarian/vegan dish created. At Cantina Rio, that approach was never an option. Since the menu was originally created, portobello mushrooms have been used to provide texture and substance along with the legume staples of Tex-Mex fare. Vegetarians or vegans have multiple options to choose from including signature tacos the Fun-Guy and Guac-O.

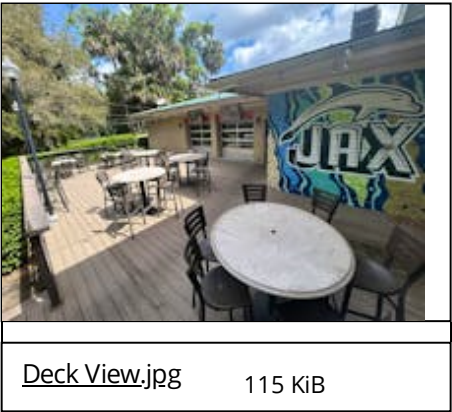
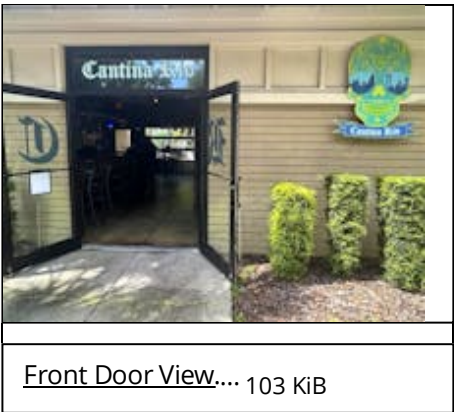
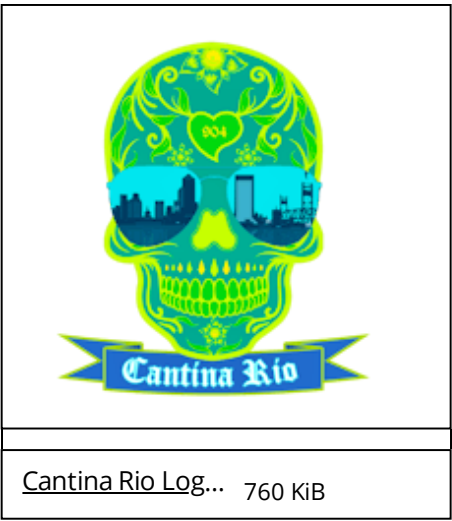
Introduction:

Data about the financial performance and customer satisfaction demonstrates the success of Cantina Rio but omits the reason this concept is different. This concept was created to fill an existing need and the imagination, execution, ties to the campus and local community, and value it offers cannot be quantified in just numbers. Local sport radio shows (Jax Sports Radio 92.5FM) are hosted in the dining room. Athletic recruiting tours routinely stop by and treat their prospects to lunch at Cantina Rio.

Essay:

Voice Of the Consumer data is attached but shows exceeding the overall satisfaction goal of 75% by almost 10%. Equally high scores in Service, Quality, Personalization, Cleanliness and Convenience speak to the reputation of the location. Sales data showed year over year growth of 35% versus the previous pub concept. Though not all-encompassing, the metrics support this new concept's success story.

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.





Tacos and Chips... 56 KiB



Nacho Fries spec... 1.2 MiB



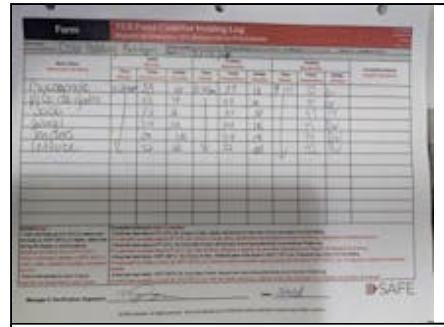
Tacos and logo.p... 883 KiB



Cantina Rio Men... 380 KiB



Cantina Build Gu... 242 KiB



holding temp lo... 79 KiB



production list.jpg 78 KiB



radio show canti... 867 KiB



Tacos and Trivia... 845 KiB



VOC Results.jpg 33 KiB



Scampi at Cantin... 3.6 MiB