

# Made in the Delta

*Larrys Tamales brings the taste of authentic Delta tamales to the Mid-South*

STORY JOHN KLYCE & PHOTOS BY CASEY HILDER

The walls of the inside are red and mostly bare. A Coca-Cola clock hangs on one side, and behind the counter are black bricks that form what looks like a chimney. But other than that the room is aesthetically empty. The tables have ketchup, salt, pepper, hot sauce and the usual condiments but nothing else, and the restrooms are fairly close to the dining area. It's more of a joint than a restaurant, and though its primary purpose is to serve food, there's not a menu to be found. Simple would almost be understating it.

But then again, grandiosity was never the point of Larrys Hot Tamales.

Wayne Tapp, a customer, opens the door, dawdles in and places his order, cane in hand. Then he takes his seat. Soon the food is whisked through the kitchen doors and brought to him in styrofoam, which at most places is reserved for to-go items. But Tapp isn't bothered. He's here three to four times a week, and he knows exactly what's in store.

Unwrapping his first tamale at a relaxed but excited pace, he digs in, his mouth meeting the zesty masa and seasoned ground beef. His appetite met, his hollow look becomes a satisfied one. For what the building lacks in décor, the food more than makes up for with taste. "It's just the quality," Tapp says. "The quality and the presentation. They're gourmet tamales."

Since its Memphis grand opening in October, Larrys Hot Tamales has provided a new set of foodies with what many have considered the



LARRY TURNER





city to be lacking: an authentic, and quality Mississippi Delta-style tamale.

Formerly located in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and known as Larry's Hot Tamales, owner Larry Turner has since moved the restaurant to the mid-south, gained Larry Hall as a co-owner, and dropped the apostrophe from the place's name. Turner made the location switch for business reasons, and so far, the change has been successful.

"It's going great," Turner said. "We've been received very well, and it's just getting better by the day. I've always liked Memphis." Turner has an admiration for the city, and he was glad to introduce Memphians to his tamales, a food he's been making for the past 50 years. "I used to help a friend back in the late sixties make tamales," he said. "He made them four or five times a year for the neighborhood, and he would allow one of his daughters and myself to help him make them. And I was okay with that because that means the process went quicker and we could eat them quicker."

Turner developed a love for tamales during this time, and he decided it wouldn't be a bad business to get into later on in life. After he retired from the military in 1994 he sold Tamales from his mother's restaurant, worked for several others, and eventually opened his Clarksdale place in 2012. Then, this year, he made the move to Memphis.

Of course, Turner didn't create the Mississippi Delta tamale, rather just putting his own spin on it. This Southern dish spans many decades, crossing and mixing cultures.

The Mississippi Delta style tamale is different from the traditional Mexican tamale in many ways, namely its use of ground beef instead of shredded meat. In addition, Mexican-style tamales are steamed over water, while the Delta tamale is cooked in a sauce. The list continues, and for the uninitiated, the differences are palpable.



# We've been helping Mississippi home buyers since 1887.

## Home Financing That's Fast, Easy and Affordable.

### Southaven Office

662-349-5544



**Brian Walters**  
Loan Officer  
901-438-1901  
NMLS# 419389  
brian.walters@iberiabankmortgage.com

### Olive Branch Office

662-895-2008 & 901-521-1015



**Sharon Farris**  
Loan Officer  
NMLS# 419442  
sharon.farris@iberiabankmortgage.com



**Donna Younger**  
Loan Officer  
901-848-6625  
NMLS# 1110803  
donna.younger@iberiabankmortgage.com

## IBERIABANK MORTGAGE

[www.iberiabankmortgage.com](http://www.iberiabankmortgage.com)

### Strong, Stable, Secure Home Financing Since 1887.

IBERIABANK Mortgage has been providing home buyers the financing they need since 1887. We're strong, stable, and secure.

### Your Loan Will Be Approved Locally.

You'll not only save time, you'll also save money. Our loan professionals understand the needs of the markets they serve.

### \*Our \$499 Flat Lender Fee Will Save You Money.


Compare our rates. Compare our fees. When you do, you'll choose IBERIABANK Mortgage as your home lender.

**SOUTHAVEN | 1240 Goodman Rd. Suite I**  
**OLIVE BRANCH | 6253 Goodman Rd. Suite C**



\*30 Year Fixed Rate: Conventional loan of \$160,000, assuming a 20% Down Payment of \$40,000. Monthly payment of \$798.86 based on an assumed note rate of 4.375% with an annual percentage rate of 4.496%. The monthly payment does not include payment for taxes and insurance premiums; the actual payment obligation may be higher. Normal credit qualifications and other terms and conditions apply. Rates and terms of this offer are subject to change without notice. Some third party closing fees will apply.



A close-up photograph of a plate of food. The plate is white with a wide, multi-colored rim in shades of blue and green. On the plate, there are several tamales wrapped in yellow corn husks, arranged in a row. To the left of the tamales, there are several square, white, perforated crackers. A vibrant red sauce is drizzled over the tamales and crackers. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a table or countertop.

*"I put a lot of love  
and care into  
what I do."  
-Larry Turner*



The Southern Foodways Alliance has researched the origins of the Mississippi Delta Tamale, and after interviewing various tamale makers of the region, the group found several different possibilities for the origin of the meal. One commonly believed story says that, in the early 20th century, migrant workers from Mexico who worked in the cotton harvest ate tamales with African-American field hands, who then put their own spin on it.

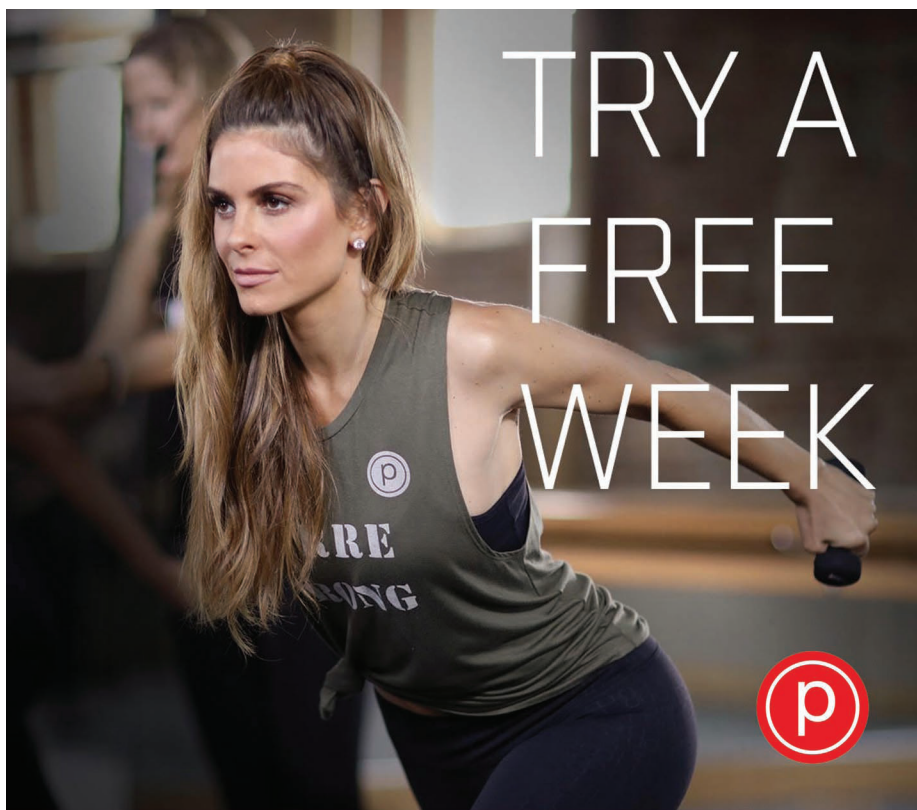
SFA historians have also noted, however, that it's possible the Hispanic workers shared their recipes with Italian immigrants of the area, and that they in fact are responsible for the regionally famous tamale.

Then of course, there's the theory that it in fact was inspired by an inexpensive, seasoned African meal called cush.


Regardless of where it came from, though, the tamale seems to have had humble origins. It wasn't developed in grandiose kitchens, but instead in the fields, or on basic stoves.

And this simplicity is something Turner has carried over into his restaurant today. It's the tamales that matter. Not their surroundings. "I put a lot of love and care into what I do," he says. "And I enjoy what I'm doing. I don't get tired of making tamales."

Now finished with his meal, Wayne Tapp pulls himself up from his chair and prepares to leave. He drove 15 miles to get here, and now he'll drive 15 miles back. But to him, it's worth it. "I've had tamales everywhere," he says. "I'm trying to get a Mississippi Delta tamale. It's hard to do it in this town, but these are right up there with the best of them."



# TRY A FREE WEEK



Pure Barre is a total body workout that burns fat, lifts your seat, and tones your entire body. It's a musically driven, body changing workout experience.

5338 Goodman Rd, Ste 121 • Olive Branch, MS 38654 • (662) 895-7877 • (Located next to Target Olive Branch)

## Merry Christmas

from the J. Cox Orthodontics Team



 **J. Cox Orthodontics**  
*A beautiful smile makes a great first impression.*

**invisalign**  **Flex Accounts Welcome**

**Jessica H. Cox DDS, MSD • Orthodontics for Children & Adults • [drj@coxortho.com](mailto:drj@coxortho.com)**  
Hernando: 662.429.8022 • 1150 Monteith Ave. Suite 100  
Olive Branch: 662.893.8024 • 5965 Goodman Road Suite 102  
Visit us online at [jcoxortho.com](http://jcoxortho.com)