



WALT MANCINI / STAFF

FAMILY RECIPE: Helga Kuhn, center, with daughters Fahren James, left, and Paris O'Kelly serve up a beef-and-chicken taco from their new restaurant, Bessie's Daughter's Soulful Tacos.

Tacos del soul

Family-owned eatery offers a twist on a classic

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ALTADENA—A new taco shop is beeing up the presence of locally owned businesses at the chain-anchored Lincoln Crossing Center.

"Out of 100,000 square feet being built, Bessie's will be the first Altadena-based business," said Steve Larnb, vice chairman of the Altadena Town Council.

Bessie's Daughter's Soulful Tacos opened Nov. 6 in the sprawling six-block retail development at 2234 Lincoln Ave. The long-planned project has been the subject of a 20-plus-year battle to re-energize the formerly blighted and crime-ridden Lincoln Avenue corridor.

Independent establishments like Bessie's were offered a

rent subsidy of 50 percent off market-rate rent, and the taco shop will be one of five non-chain businesses in the center, according to developer Dom-Platz & Co.

Designed by Eric Lloyd Wright, grandson of legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the \$24 million development will include a 24 Hour Fitness gym and a Farm Fresh Market grocery store, which developers hope will open next week. Aside from Bessie's, Panda Express is the only other location in the development open for business.

This month, the taco shop is having a "soft opening" without advertising, Bessie's co-owner Helga Kuhn said. Positive word of mouth, however, has meant business is good for Kuhn.

"The community is really supporting us... Lunchtime is usually crazy around here," Kuhn

said, noting with pride that the shop is minority-owned.

With her first restaurant, Kuhn is banking on a 50-year-old recipe concocted by her mother, Bessie. Kuhn says her tacos are an American take on the Mexican classic.

Before opening the restaurant, Kuhn traveled nationwide as an event planner. While on tour, she would prepare her mother's tacos for co-workers.

"My boss used to tell me, 'When you leave, you need to open a restaurant,'" she recalled.

So she did.

Kuhn quit her job, took a loan out on her property, and partnered with daughter Fahren, 25, to open up shop.

But just what makes the tacos soulful?

"It's comfort food," Fahren Kuhn said. "It's in the seasoning we use — it soothes your soul."