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An honored place in the history books



(LEFT) WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA, (RIGHT) CIA PHOTO

THE RAID that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, Sunday was one of the greatest intelligence successes in U.S. history, and Carmel Valley resident Leon Panetta, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was at the center of the effort that identified bin Laden's hideout and of the planning and execution of the top-secret incursion that killed him. According to the White House, as Navy SEALs moved in, a concerned Panetta (right photo) was at the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Va., monitoring incoming video and providing commentary for President Barack Obama and other top officials at the White House. Later, when the raid had reached its successful conclusion, a more relaxed Panetta joined Obama and his national security brain trust in the White House situation room (left photo). As soon as the details of Panetta's role in the momentous achievement began to sink in, Monterey Peninsula residents started brainstorming ways to honor him, including the possible re-naming of the airport in Panetta's honor.

Margarita man's Smithsonian adventure

By KELLY NIX

IF YOU were one of the millions of Americans this week who loosely celebrated Cinco De Mayo by sipping a margarita — one of the most popular alcoholic beverages in the United States — you may want to thank Mariano Martinez.

The Dallas, Texas, restaurateur, who has a home in Pebble Beach, invented the frozen margarita machine 40 years ago.

Mariano, a 10th-grade dropout, opened his first restaurant, Mariano's Mexican Cuisine, in Dallas when he was 26 years old. It was the city's first upscale Tex-Mex establishment.

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MARGARITA

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"I knew margaritas were going to be an important part of my restaurant," he told The Pine Cone.

But the eatery's opening day, which Mariano was able to finance through a \$500 Small Business Administration loan, was a disaster when customers told him the margaritas were, in fact, "horrible."

"The bartenders were overwhelmed with drink orders," explained Mariano, 66. "They weren't measuring the tequila. And some margaritas weren't cold, some didn't have ice, some were not strong enough..."

After that night, he realized quickly there needed to be consistency with the beverage. Using blenders took too long. So he looked toward the machines that produced those sweet frozen drinks at 7-Eleven stores.

"I got the idea watching kids drink Slurpees," he said. "That machine addressed all the issues we had with frozen margaritas."

A similar machine, Mariano figured, would allow the beverage to be pre-made while it also ensured the alcohol content and temperature were consistent.

"What could be colder than frozen?" he said.

Mariano tinkered with and modified a soft-serve ice cream maker, which worked. His bartenders started making frozen margaritas in 5-gallon batches.

"I had to modify the ice cream maker like you would soup up a car," he said.

Though the machine undoubtedly would help his bartenders be more efficient, other restaurant owners told Mariano nobody would pay the \$1.25 he was asking for a frozen margarita that was made from a machine.

Critics also suggested Mariano hide the device so patrons — who included Dallas Cowboys and other successful Dallasites — didn't realize how their drinks were made.

But customers embraced the idea, said Mariano, whose restaurant was the only one in town at the time serving the frozen beverage. Pretty soon, the naysayers jumped

onboard.

"All the big chain operators took note, and everybody in Dallas wanted a margarita machine," he said.

Though it was successful and helped set his restaurant apart from others, Mariano never gave himself the credit he would later receive from others. He was just a young man trying to succeed in the restaurant business.

"I never even thought I invented anything," Mariano said.

He also didn't apply for a patent for the machine, which revolutionized the way frozen margaritas were made. The machine was soon copied by manufacturers and are now in 36 countries, he said. The invention emerged at a time when margaritas weren't a popular drink. Many Americans didn't know about the beverage, and those who did didn't want to spend the time making them.

Using the machine makes margaritas "just as easy as pulling a beer," he said.

Also at that time, not many Tex-Mex restaurants featured bars. But as the margarita grew in popularity in the 1970s, the bar became the center of Tex-Mex eateries, and the chilly beverage was as common as chips and salsa.

In September 2010, Mariano received ultimate recognition when the esteemed

Smithsonian museum listed his frozen margarita machine as one of the Top 10 American inventions, alongside Thomas Edison's light bulb and Alexander Graham Bell's telephone. His original margarita machine is proudly on display in Washington, D.C.

Museum director Brent Glass called the invention a "classic example of the American entrepreneurial spirit."

"To us at the Smithsonian," Green said, "it's a story about American innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. And it coincides with a very interesting story of Tex-Mex becoming a phenomenon."

Mariano, who lives primarily in Dallas, has six lucrative restaurants, each featuring numerous frozen margarita machines. He doesn't regret not obtaining a patent for his invention. "I never thought about marketing the machines," he said. "I just stick with what I enjoy. I have been plenty successful."

To commemorate the anniversary next Wednesday, Mariano's restaurants are offering deals on the beverage that his machine helped popularize. But he'll be on the Monterey Peninsula that day, looking forward to celebrating on the greens.

"I hope to be playing golf at MPCC," he said. "And I will celebrate by drinking a margarita afterward."



PHOTO/RICHARD STRAUSS, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Mariano Martinez, who has a home in Pebble Beach, is shown with the first frozen margarita machine, an invention he developed 40 years ago. The machine is now on display at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.