



**By Carolyn Lee**

***The Imperial Republican***

Smokin' Leroy's, a popular breakfast and lunch restaurant at 140 E. 12th Street in Imperial, will close Dec. 16, upon the sale of the business to Miguel Esparza and Gabriella Hernandez of McCook.

The husband and wife plan to turn the establishment into a Tequilas, similar to the one they own in McCook.

The number of people from Imperial who have been frequenting Tequilas in McCook led Esparza and Hernandez to consider opening a restaurant in Imperial.

"We had a lot of customers who come here and say 'You should open one in Imperial,'" Esparza said. They plan to open Tequilas the first week of February 2013.

Prior to that remodeling will take place. The restaurant will have the same unique tables and chairs as the McCook restaurant, but a bigger menu with more items than the McCook Tequilas, Esparza said.

He and his wife have applied for a liquor license that will transfer from the one they have in McCook, he said.

"As time goes on we will build a new section" in about a year, he said, expanding the party room on the east side of the restaurant. "It's a little smaller (than McCook) but will work out," he stated.

The couple has owned Tequilas in McCook for one and one-half years.

Lavonne and Leroy Musick, who are selling Smokin' Leroy's, purchased the 12th Street Cafe in 1999, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. They sold it, then reopened it in September 2008 as Smokin' Leroy's.

The restaurant specialized in smoked meats. The couple traveled extensively in the south, learning about and researching smoked meats, Lavonne said.

While Leroy had worked in restaurants in his youth, Lavonne had never done so. "It was a real learning experience," she laughed.

Their final day serving meals at Smokin' Leroy's will be Dec. 16. The couple plans to retire and doesn't know what that entails, other than some travel.

"We had a lot of really good, loyal customers," Lavonne said. "It was a good experience, but it's time to retire."

She said people who own a restaurant need good feet and legs, as well as energy. Even the three days a week Smokin' Leroy's was open recently was "a lot of hours," even when closed, to work, she noted.