



## If you add in Zilch, you'll have a lower-cal margarita

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**Buy Star photos** COURTESY OF FERNANDO CAMPA Fernando and Carolyn Campa, at El Charro Restaurant's North Oracle Road location, introduced Zilch margarita mix earlier this year to the Tucson market.

The ultimate summertime cocktail is arguably the blessed margarita - unless you're counting calories.

An average margarita packs at least 550 calories and nearly 40 grams of carbohydrates.

All that sugar adds up.

Which is what led Marcy Johnson, a Houston real estate agent, to retreat to her kitchen a few years ago and

concoct a sugar-free margarita mix.

"I just went in my kitchen and started working on it until I came up with something that tasted great," said Johnson, who was on a low-carb diet at the time but didn't want to give up her margarita when the family went to their favorite Mexican restaurant.

Johnson mixed and tweaked, reconfigured and dabbled until she came up with a sugar-free powdered margarita mix. A few years later, her son suggested they market it.

Hence, Zilch, a zero-calorie, zero-carb margarita mix that uses the artificial sweetener aspartame. It was introduced last spring into the Tucson market by Fernando and Carolyn Campa.

The pair stumbled upon Zilch last summer when they were searching online for a sugar-free margarita mix to serve at a birthday party for radio personality Shannon Black. Fernando Campa and Black are friends through his work as entertainment coordinator at Desert Diamond Casino.

Campa said they tried Zilch and liked it. Black, the morning DJ on KIIM 99.5 FM, said she loved it.

"I even put vodka in mine because I like it better than tequila. I call them vodkaritas," she said.

Not long after that party, Campa called Johnson to get a discount on a larger order and was recruited to distribute the product in Arizona. By late last year, he had struck a deal with the Tucson-based Golden Eagle Distributors, which began marketing the product statewide.

Today, you can get Zilch from a number of Tucson retailers including Walgreens, The Rumrunner and A.J.'s Fine Foods. It's also served at a number of Tucson restaurants including Old Father Inn, Casa Molina and El Charro locations. The price varies between \$5 and \$6 for a box of 10 single-serving packages.

El Charro combines Zilch with Patron Silver for a margarita with a calorie count that drops to about 70, said El Charro President Ray Flores, who also uses it at his newest restaurant, Sir Veza's Taco Garage on East Speedway at Swan Road.

The chain serves Skinny Margaritas at El Charro and Lo-Carboritas at Sir Veza's, he said.

Campa said Golden Eagle is working to get Zilch next into big grocery outlets, including Fry's.

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Posted in Dining, Cathalena-e-burch on *Thursday, August 5, 2010 12:00 am* Updated: 3:24 pm. | Tags:

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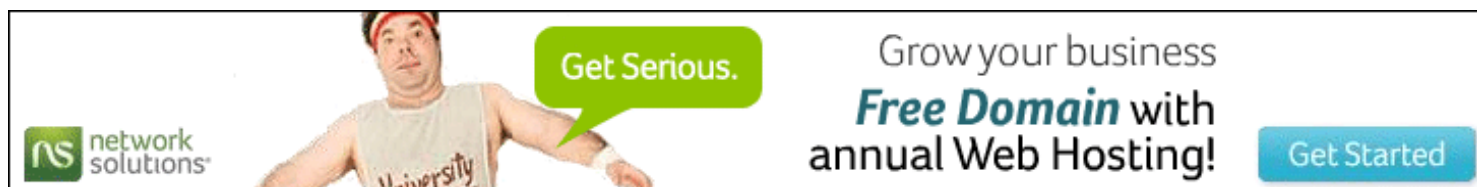
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