

MONEY

A hub for Hispanic Business

By MICHAEL TOMBERLIN
News staff writer

A stylish shopping center catering to Hispanics in Hoover is ready for business.

Owners of the 17,000-square-foot Plaza Fiesta - designed by Williams-Blackstock Architects, with bright colors and artistic decors - were hoping to open the grocery store and shop selling boots as early as this weekend. A restaurant whose striking looks were crafted by one of Mexico's most celebrated designers will open at the center off Lorna Road later this month.

To get the project done, Hollis Real Estate worked closely with owners Plaza Fiesta LLC, a partnership of brothers Rafael Chavez and Jose Chavez and their cousins Martin Ochoa and Manuel Ochoa.

"As a member of the growing Hispanic community here in Birmingham, we knew firsthand that there was a demand for products and services geared especially towards the Hispanic market," Jose Chavez said.



NEWS STAFF/STEVE BARNETTE

Architect Sean Whitt, left, developer Mark Hollis, owner Rafael Chavez, and developer Rich Chism are ready to open the Plaza Fiesta shopping center in Hoover.

Mexican designer has hand in creation of Plaza Fiesta

The Chavez brothers have had success with other businesses - two small groceries and three restaurants - that cater primarily to Hispanics, but developing a retail center was new for them. Jose Chavez said he believes Hollis Real Estate gave the project the special attention it needed.

"We couldn't have done it without them," he said.

Rich Chism, principal with Hollis, said his firm believed in the Plaza Fiesta idea and in the Chavez brothers' past success.

"Our clients know how to operate grocery stores and restaurants, but needed help developing their own commercial real estate project," Chism said.

The center features:

-- El Mercado, a grocery that sells authentic items imported from Mexico and has a meat and fish selection preferred by Hispanic customers, a Spanish style bakery and freshly made tamales.

-- El Galope, a store devoted to the sale of Mexican apparel such as boots, hats, soccer team uniforms, soccer shoes and imported baptismal dresses. The store will also carry music and other items that cater to Hispanic customers.

-- Lavanderia, a modern laundromat in the shopping center that has already opened. It is a much-needed facility for Hispanics who live in the area, Jose Chavez said.

-- The Iguana Grill, which anchors one end of the center, will serve traditional Tex-Mex cuisine along with authentic dishes such as Mexican stew, hominy, carnitas, gorditas and spicy seafood.

Getting the Plaza Fiesta project rolling required lots of work.

Mark Hollis, founder of Hollis, represented Plaza Fiesta LLC in acquiring the site. Chism directed the design development phase by working with Williams Blackstock and civil engineer Sain and Associates. Gallet and Associates was brought in for environmental reports and geotechnical studies.

Hollis Real Estate represented the owners at Hoover City Hall to gain necessary approvals for the center. Hollis and Chism also met with a number of lenders and prepared the extensive applications and business plans for the financing of the project. Chism worked directly with general contractor Bradford Building Co. and engineering firms Jackson Renfro Associates Inc. and McWilliams Associates P.C.

Trip to Mexico

Chism's work took him to Mexico where he met with one of the country's most acclaimed interior designers, Martha Figueroa. Her firm, Adobe Designs, crafted the look of the Iguana Grill.

Adobe Designs has created interior designs for 30 restaurants and hotels - mostly in Mexico, but also across Central and South America, as well as China, Japan and Spain.



NEWS STAFF/STEVE BARNETTE

Bill Scarborough works on a lighting fixture in the Iguana Grill at the Plaza Fiesta Shopping Center

The brightly colored Iguana Grill will be featured in the book "Interiores en Mexico" published by the International Interior Designers Association.

"The restaurant is truly unique with bright colors, a 16-foot-by-32-foot hand-painted mural, metal works, and more than 250 decorative light fixtures from Mexico," Chism said.

Chism said the extra effort was worth it.

"We are very proud of this development and hope the community will enjoy it as well," Chism said.

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