

Retail Redevelopment Has Designs on Latino Market

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Seeking to capitalize on the growing population and bulging buying power of Latinos, two Korean brothers from the San Gabriel Valley spent nearly \$20 million turning their Lynwood shopping plaza into what they claim to be the country's largest and most authentic Mexican mercado.

Donald and Min Chae, who own LTC Development Inc. in Lynwood, converted their Lynwood Marketplace and Lynwood Town Center into Plaza Mexico.

The neighboring retail centers sat on a 35-acre site bounded by the Century (105) Freeway, Long Beach Boulevard, Imperial Highway and State Street. The mercado combined the existing retail areas with an alameda, or public park and walking area, to creating an overall development covering 450,000 square feet.

The leasing agent for the property announced that many of the tenants are Latino-owned businesses.

To clear the way for the alameda, a couple of warehouses on the site were torn down and replaced with 175,000 square feet of new construction linking the existing retail structures. All of the remaining buildings got Mexican-inspired facades, and a structure to house the newest tenant, Hometown Buffet, was built on a freestanding pad in the mercado theme.

Plaza Mexico, located in Lynwood, California, encompasses the quadrant bounded by Imperial Highway, Long Beach Boulevard, State Street and the 105 freeway. The site has retail, food, and office space. The exterior spaces have plazas, providing outdoor entertainment, sitting areas, fountains, and kiosks.

Plaza Mexico's design follows the basic principles of the ancient city of Monte Alban, which is located approximately 300 miles south of Mexico City. The ancient city now an archeological site was designed with a north-south access; with platform structures similar to the pyramids of the sun and the moon placed at each end. The spatial composition of Monte Alban's two platforms includes a series of ceremonial spaces, plazas, and courtyards defined by massive facades. This organization is also evident within the many small towns (known as "pueblos") in Mexico.

Typically, the pueblo's main plaza is a quadrant surrounded by a church, government buildings, markets, and museums. Within the landscaped plaza there are fountains and a "kiosco", which is a raised platform used as a stage. The purpose of the plaza design is to accommodate social gatherings. The design also facilitates the cultural appreciation of the brilliantly colored building facades and the spatial composition.

Plaza Mexico reproduced the ambiance and rich culture of the true Mexican pueblos like San Miguel de Allende, Dolores Hidalgo, Oaxaca and Taxco. The colonial architecture found in prominent urban centers such as Guadalajara and Mexico City will also be incorporated into the design of the plazas, entrances, buildings and kiosks.

A huge electronic billboard was erected at the intersection of the 105 Freeway and Long Beach Boulevard. The sign offers all tenants the opportunity to post ads visible to the estimated 230,000 vehicles that pass the intersection each day.

The location makes the highly successful shopping and multi-purpose cultural center the most important project in the city, "the Hispanic City Walk."

