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Valley



Merger mania allows a few moguls—such as Disney's Michael Eisner, left—to control what we know, writes a media consultant.

Commentary, B11

A Colorful Makeover

■ **Development:** A \$20-million remodeling of a run-down Panorama City strip mall will have a Latino theme, mariachi bandstand and food court.

By IRENE GARCIA
TIMES STAFF WRITER

PANORAMA CITY—Cary Lefton and Michael Bollenbacher vow to turn a run-down strip mall into a festive and scenic plaza with colorful storefronts and an outdoor promenade.

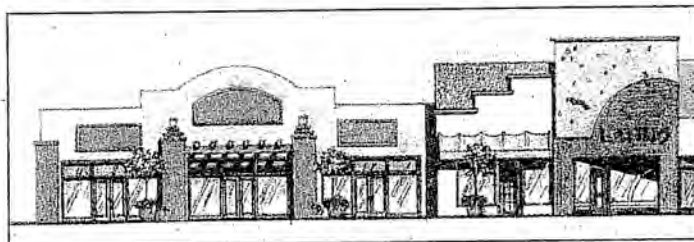
The new Plaza del Valle will have a Latino theme—appropriate for this community whose population of 59,749 is 60% Latino—and be modeled after Olvera Street Plaza, the Los Angeles replica of a Mexican village market.

The development will provide a much-needed transformation of the 11-acre site on Van Nuys Boulevard, between Parthenia Avenue and Chase Street.

Five of the mall's 22 spaces are vacant, with black iron bars on the windows and chipped paint on the walls. The remaining businesses include a coin laundry, dental office, uniform store and Central Financial Center, with large signs advertising *seguro de auto* (auto insurance) and income tax *rapidito* (fast).

All of this is just down the street from Panorama Mall, which is anchored by Wal-Mart and La Curacao, a department

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Artist's rendering, above, shows the renovation plans for the strip mall by developers Cary Lefton and Michael Bollenbacher, below, who plan to rename it Plaza del Valle and model it after the Olvera Street Plaza.





MYUNG J. CHUN / Los Angeles Times

Developers hope the new Plaza del Valle can become a community center with a terrace where local performers entertain the public for free.

MALL: \$20-Million Remodeling Planned

Continued from B1

store that caters to Latinos.

The new Plaza del Valle will not try to compete with the mall, the developers said, but instead be more of a community center with small businesses and a terrace where local performers can entertain the public for free.

"This property does not lend itself to a big anchor tenant," Lefton said. "The main feature will be an open plaza like European and Latin American countries."

Officials Back Plan

The plan includes remodeling the facades of existing stores, construction of the outdoor promenade, with 80 spaces for small businesses and a mariachi bandstand, a food court, landscaping and an open-air produce market.

The overhaul, at a cost of about \$20 million, will begin in February,



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said Lefton and Bollenbacher, co-owners of Agora Realty and Construction. The company bought the property for \$10.3 million last year.

The project, which has the support of city officials and area merchants, is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

"We're very happy that whole area is going through a revitaliza-

tion and the community is very happy too," said Arline Desanctis, chief deputy for Los Angeles City Councilman Joel Wachs, who represents the district. "That area was too deteriorated for too long."

Merchants 'Excited'

Joseph Blanco has seen it firsthand for 15 years. He owns three businesses—a nightclub, an events production office and a record store—in the strip mall.

"I've seen the area go from fair to very poor to a little better and now, hopefully, great," Blanco said. "The entire community will be improved by this development. We're all very excited. There's not one single business owner that's not in favor of this."

Nearby homeowners also favor the project, although some have concerns, said Martha Garcia, co-

chairwoman of a 100-member Panorama City homeowner association.

She said residents of the homes that border the strip mall's parking lot worry about increased crowds, noise and traffic. So do other nearby residents.

"Right now, it's not frequented, not a lot of people go there," Garcia said. "Really, it's kind of desolate, so there are some concerns that the peace is not going to be there anymore."

She added, however, that even concerned homeowners like the project because they believe it will benefit them and the entire community.

"There's going to be more shops and we can have coffee and walk around and shop there," Garcia said. "I really find that appealing. It's going to have a huge impact on this area."