



The Northgate González Market in the Mercado del Barrio offers an assortment of Hispanic foods. NELVIN C. CEPEDA • U-T PHOTOS

Mercado is measuring up



A large apartment building at the Mercado del Barrio has retail space below the units. A restaurant/bar is being sought for the development.

Development has revitalized Barrio Logan, but restaurant/bar as hangout still sought

KATHERINE POYTHRESS • U-T

Barrio Logan residents cherished high hopes for the Mercado del Barrio, an \$80 million residential and commercial project that was 20 years in the making.

They hoped it would bring, foremost, a supermarket. They also wished for shops, restaurants, new homes and a procession of public events and festivals — in short, a town center to revitalize the urban community that was split by construction of Interstate

5 in the 1950s and the Coronado Bridge in the 1960s.

It's now been 16 months since the long-awaited, two-block Mercado opened, and residents feel they are well on their way to realizing that dream.

Northgate González Supermarket opened a 36,000-square-foot store in December 2012, anchoring the development, and eventually attracted Tocumbo Ice Cream, T-Mobile, Little Caesar's Pizza, Fathom CrossFit, Asia Wok, a tax-preparation business and a laundromat.

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All that's missing is a good place to hang out, says Barrio Station executive director Rachael Ortiz. The community would like to have something like Chuey's Numero Uno, which died a slow death during the recent economic recession.

"We're waiting for a restaurant with a bar to go in," Ortiz said. "Chicano people like to hang out together, and we have always had what we used to call a night club in the Barrio. We're looking for something like that."

She knows Mercado developer Shea Properties has made overtures to some local craft breweries. One or two of them are considering the invitation, she said, but that dream may not come to life until the community college district finishes its new campus nearby.

The San Diego Community College District is scheduled to finish a 50,000-square-foot, 22-classroom continuing education building in early 2015.

In the meantime, Ortiz is happy with the restaurants and shops that have made their way into the Mercado to help revitalize the community.

Barrio Logan got not just



Barrio Station officials hope a restaurant/bar will fill some of the unoccupied retail space that still remains at the Mercado del Barrio. NELVIN C. CEPEDA • U-T

any supermarket, but one tailored for the heavily Latino community. Northgate González took a gamble other supermarkets weren't willing to take, she said. Vons, Albertsons and Ralphs all turned down the chance to open stores there, because they didn't like the idea of having the bay behind them instead of more homes filled with hungry shoppers.

"Northgate González knew the warning signs

and the high risks of moving here, and we don't want to lose them for anything," she said. "They hired a lot of people from the community, and they have all the products we need. That is the Barrio Logan dream, and it is working."

Northgate employs about 125 people from Barrio Logan and its surrounding community, and its smorgasbord of meat, fresh produce, hot deli foods and household goods

draws shoppers from the community, the shipyards and beyond.

Ortiz choked up as she described the changes she has seen not only in her community, but her individual friends' lives. A young father she knows from the neighborhood, who she said seemed lost before, has newfound purpose in the job he got at Northgate.

Kevin McCook, vice president of development at Shea

Project components

Developed by Shea Properties, the commercial component of the two-block Mercado del Barrio project at Cesar Chavez Parkway and Newton Street is divided into four elements:

Estrella del Mercado apartments: 92 units on top of the ground floor of retail and restaurant spaces with parking tucked in the middle of the building.

Northgate González Market: A 35,891-square-foot supermarket with a Mexican flair and message of nutrition.

Retail/restaurant building: A 13,500-square-foot space for a half-dozen or more shops and restaurants with roll-up doors and giant sliding glass doors that, when open, eliminate the boundary between indoor and outdoor space.

Plaza: About 125 by 150 feet with a fountain, stage and plenty of space for carts, kiosks and entertainers that can be doubled in size with the periodic closing of Newton.

Properties in Aliso Viejo, said the development group took great pains to make the Mercado a place that people and retailers would want. Now that the economy is recovering, he said, the market for the vacant spots is picking up. For a project in a redeveloping area, that's something to be proud of.

"We're already starting to see it fill," said McCook, who oversaw the commercial portion of the mercado. "All the offers, tours and tenant interest have picked up significantly, and we're

starting to get more traction and food. Now people see that everything is actually moving forward as we promised.

"We're confident it's going to be a success."

Shea Properties declined to disclose the occupancy rate for the two-block project's 85,000 square feet of retail space, but the Northgate market consumes about 42 percent of it.

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