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Americas takes tony center site

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Michael Cordua is attempting to do what Tony Vallone couldn't pull off — open a new restaurant in the River Oaks Shopping Center.

In the fall of 2010, Cordua plans to put an Americas restaurant in the newly redeveloped northwest corner of the center at the intersection of Shepherd and West Gray.

In early 2009, haute restaurateur Vallone announced plans to open a new bistro and wine bar in the exact same spot.

His concept was contested by neighborhood residents, who argued that the restaurant's open-air balcony would stick out too far and violate City of Houston setback requirements.

Also citing noise concerns, nearby residents took their case to the City Planning Department, and center owner **Weingarten Realty** temporarily halted construction.

Weingarten Realty got retroactive city approval to continue the balcony buildout, and ultimately agreed to enclose the space.

In the interim, Vallone had opted against going ahead with his restaurant due to the down economy, and both parties terminated the deal by mutual agreement.

Now, the **River Oaks Americas** is slated to take over the second-floor, 9,150-square-foot site featuring an elevated bar area and private event spaces.

The new tenant seems to be working out better for Weingarten Realty. Patty Bender, senior vice president, says the owner is "thrilled."

Cordua says the River Oaks Shopping Center will be an "excellent" home for his third Americas restaurant location.

"The center's personality is very much like what we have created in our Americas restaurants — vibrant and eclectic with a sense of relaxed glamour," says Cordua.

Allison Wollam

Hotel no longer near the Galleria airport

The **InterContinental** Houston wanted to make crystal clear that the hotel is nowhere near an airport.

This week, the hotel was renamed InterContinental Houston Near The Galleria.

David Fusto, director of sales and marketing, says the change stemmed from confusion over the hotel's location being linked to George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

"When I would tell people where I worked, they would reply, 'By the airport?'" Fusto recalls. "Our new name helps to better identify the location of the hotel and better associates us with the Galleria, which is a main draw for tourists."

The InterContinental has operated under that name in Houston since 2002. Before that it was a **Crown Plaza Hotel** near the Galleria.

Christine Hall

Sneak preview makes planetary suite music

What goes better than music and movies? Perhaps being the first to see a new movie before anyone else?

Houston will be the first city to experience a new film of planetary images set to "The Planets," the