

# Cantina Laredo to bring 'gourmet Mexican' fare to Penn Square

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Cantina Laredo, a "gourmet Mexican" restaurant, is opening in Penn Square Mall, replacing the space Garcia's once occupied. The new restaurant will be the first Cantina Laredo in the state.

"We're really excited about that," said Bob Landdeck, Penn Square general manager. "It's a whole new restaurant; bigger and better."

Landdeck said Garcia's vacated the mall at the end of August. The Mexican restaurant was owned by Eateries Inc. and was the company's last Garcia's location in the state.

Edmond-based Eateries began selling its Garcia's locations in 2002. Quail Springs Mall's Garcia's became an El Chico in March 2004. Eateries Founder Vince Orza said the Penn Square Garcia's "recently sold to El Chico."

It's not an El Chico, but Cantina Laredo is one of the brands under Consolidated Restaurant Operations Inc., the company that operates El Chico, Spaghetti Warehouse and various other concepts. CRO did not return calls.

Cantina Laredo is scheduled to open before Thanksgiving. Landdeck said construction for the 6,800 square-foot eatery began in August. He said the restaurant will be about 1,000 feet larger than Garcia's and will have 50 percent more seating.

Bob Rader, an Oklahoma City industry observer, said it's exciting to have a new player coming into the metro's competitive restaurant market.

"You hate to see the old one go, but on the other side of the fence is a new one coming," Rader said.

Cantina Laredo has 11 locations in Texas, Arizona and Florida. Menu items include signatures such as fajitas, tacos and enchiladas as well as specials including shrimp and 16 ounce ribeyes.

"I like to think of it as gourmet Mexican food," Landdeck said. He said Cantina Laredo was on Penn Square's radar for a tenant.

"We are always looking for new concepts, and it was just a timing issue," Landdeck said.