

Chili's founder opening new eatery

Chili's founder Larry Lavine will open Mandola's Italian Market in South Arlington in November, the Dallas-based restaurateur said Wednesday.

Lavine purchased the rights to Mandola's earlier this year from Carrabba's Italian Grill founder Damian Mandola, who will continue to own and operate Mandola's in the Austin and San Antonio markets.

After opening the first North Texas Mandola's, Lavine hopes to eventually take the concept nationwide.

"The quality is high and the price is low, so it's a good value," he said.

Mandola and a team of private investors will sink about \$2 million into the lease and renovation of a former Bravo Italian restaurant in 7,300 square feet at the Arlington Highlands shopping center, just east of The Parks at Arlington Mall.

The concept will be an Italian market that sells items such as cheese, bread, meat and gelato. But woven into the market will be restaurant seating for about 200, serving casual Italian fare such as pannini, pasta, pizza and wine.

The Arlington location will employ about 65 people. North Texas can support eight to 10 Mandola's, Lavine said, and he's in negotiations on more leases.

John Mathes with The Retail Connection, who oversees leasing at Arlington Highlands, said he's glad Lavine is stepping in with Mandola's to fill an Italian food void.

"We have a good mix of restaurant, retail and entertainment," Mathes said. "Many of our restaurants have very strong sales."