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THE INSIDE SCOOP

By Paolo Lucchesi

La Rondalla clears mariachi hurdle

Luna Barrios promises that the margaritas at San Francisco's revamped **La Rondalla** (901 Valencia St.) will still be stiff — and the Christmas lights will make a comeback.

It's been something of a running joke along Valencia Street to say that La Rondalla is going to reopen any day now. The 60-year-old family-owned Mission restaurant has been closed since 2007, when health inspectors forced the Barrios family to shut down and turn off the perennial Christmas lights.

The road to reopening has been a tough one, says Barrios, who, along with her sister Betty, is taking over operations from her father.

"It had a lot to do with us having some financial troubles, so we had to get

back on our feet first," she says, also chalking up the hitches to working with the wrong people and the usual bureaucratic delays.

On the bright side, the Barrioses used the down time to travel to Mexico, so when it (eventually) reopens, La Rondalla 2.0 will feature a few new dishes, primarily in the seafood and adobo realms.

Original chef **Mario Hernandez** is returning, and Barrios promises they'll pay a lot more attention to the food this time around.

On Tuesday, the Entertainment Commission signed off on the last license needed to revive La Rondalla: the mariachi.

Even with the green lights, Barrios is hesitant to speculate on an open-

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ing date, though the contractors are slated to be done in a week. After that, all that is needed is the standard final inspection approval, like all new restaurants.

And regarding the famous Christmas lights? "There was a lot going on before," Barrios says of the old decor. "But we do want to put some Christmas lights somewhere. It was tacky before, but still fun to be in. We want to change the look a little bit, but we still want to incorporate the Christmas lights and get that old feeling."

Square dance: Speaking of epic delays, the culinary-centric revival of Oakland's **Jack London Square** is showing signs of life, particularly in the



Lacy Atkins / The Chronicle 2009

A new pizza and beer specialist called the Forge will be joining Bocanova and other restaurants reviving Jack London Square.

wake of the jam-packed Eat Real Festival last month.

The grand plans unveiled in 2008 took a hit during the recession, but

in recent years, restaurants like Haven and Bocanova have opened alongside retailers like Baia Pasta and Miette.

Now, there's more

action en route. A pizza and beer specialist, the **Forge**, has signed on to a 4,739-square-foot waterfront space (66 Franklin St.), and is due to open

early next year. Three more restaurant spaces are still available; for what it's worth, Jack London Square sits inside a state tax-friendly "enterprise zone."

Then there's the biggie: the market hall. Reps at the square say they hope to ink food purveyors who can combine on-site production with retail and wholesale.
