Artists' Alliance evicted

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Staff Writer

LAFAYETTE - The Artists' Alliance has formally been asked to vacate the old Hardware Store by mid-June by the family who owns the historic Vermilion Street building.

"Your difficulty in providing rent and/or solutions towards remedying the ever-increasing deterioration of the Hardware Store has forced us to find another tenant who will help us preserve and restore it," Yvette Voorhies wrote to the Alliance in a letter dated Monday.

Voorhies, one of four sibling owners of the more than 100-year-old building, asked the Alliance, which has occupied the space for 12 years, to move out by June 18.

"Everyone was knocked for a loop when this arrived (Wednesday)," said Gwyn Hutslar, president of the Alliance.

However, Hutslar admitted the Alliance has had a "mutual understanding" with the Voorhies family that "at some point in time" the family would be looking for another occupant for the building.

Voorhies said the arrangement the family and the Alliance have had simply won't work anymore.

She and Hutslar said the family originally agreed to lease the building to the Alliance in exchange for specific renovations the Alliance was to make to the facility.

Although both women agreed an amicable relationship has existed through the years, they disagreed as to whether all the conditions of the lease were met.

Hutslar said the Alliance regularly maintained the building, made any needed emergency repairs and covered the family's insurance obligation "as fully as possible."

She added the Alliance spent more than $9,900 on the old store between 1992 and 1997. It also invested about $20,000 in the building between 1986 and 1991, she said.

Voorhies, whose grandfather owned the store for 40 years, argued some of the original conditions of the lease have never been met. And the kinds of repairs that need to be made to the building are, she said, "out of the realm of the Alliance's capabilities."

"Now other tenants want to do business with me and that's where I'm going," she added. "It's come to a time when we both need to say we're not meeting each other's needs."

Hutslar said the Alliance is committed to staying downtown.

"We have our eye on a couple (spaces) in particular, but there are actually four or five we're willing to look at hard," she said, declining to elaborate on their locations.

Hutslar said since news of a possible relocation became public earlier this month, the community's support has encouraged the organization and reminded it of the role it plays in Lafayette.

"We're an organization, not a building," she said. "We're a cause, not a place."