Bocage Plantation set to get face-lift

New owner spells out his plans

BY MARK H. HUNTER
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DARROW — The new owner of Bocage Plantation has some big plans for the historic property along the Mississippi River, but he must first repair water-damaged walls and do major renovation to ensure the leakage problems don’t re-occur.

Dr. Marion Rundell, a pathologist from Seabrook, Texas, purchased the four-bedroom, 7,400-square-foot Greek Revival-style mansion house and 116 acres of surrounding land at auction in early December 2007, for $2,150,000.

The antebellum plantation, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, had been advertised for $5.5 million by the previous owners, Margot Genre Turk, her husband Milan Turk, and Margot’s sister, Jeanne Lorio, and her husband, Dr. Phil Lorio.

“Dr. Phil and I resolved in the hundreds of thousands of dollars to fully restore it but I have a passion for historic things and a passion for this,” Rundell, 61, said Saturday. “And, it was a good buy because it has a lot of land with it.”

Rundell, who grew up in Pineville and attended the LSU School of Medicine, said he plans to completely restore the 1801 mansion house, fully furnish it from his extensive antique collection, and then open it to the public, perhaps as soon as September or October.

“Another one of my passions is public service, and I want the public to see this Louisiana treasure and see it in all its grandeur,” Rundell said.

He also plans to build a pair of new outbuildings that will architecturally match and flank the main house and include shops and restaurants. A large, glassed-in “gazebo on steroids” is planned for the back yard for events such as weddings, Rundell said.

Just this past week, Rundell had a new $25,000 roof installed that he said he hopes would solve a chronic problem of moisture interior walls that are now peeling paint.

As soon as the weather clears up, he is planning to excavate all the way around the house in order to waterproof the brick foundation and then install a French drain system to draw water away from the house.

Rundell brought with him from Texas a work crew of a half-dozen men and hired some Ascension Parish women to clean the interior now that all the furniture from the previous owners has been removed. He said he is looking for qualified local contractors to build the outbuildings, gazebo and other structures.

After being inspected by several engineers, Rundell said, the experts still weren’t sure if the wet walls are due to “rising damp,” a term for water being absorbed up through the masonry from the wet ground, or whether the walls were wet from a leaky roof. “Whatever I have to do I will stop the water from coming into the house,” Rundell said.

After the moisture damage is addressed, Rundell said, the next step will be to coat the exterior with waterproof elastomeric paint, which expands and contracts, and then repaint the interior walls.

The kitchen, installed since the turn of the last century, will be removed in order to restore the house to its antebellum condition. The large, two-story screened-in back porch will be glassed in.

The home was built in 1801 by Emanuel Marquis Pons Bringer as a wedding present for his 14-year-old daughter, Françoise, and her husband, Christoph Colomb, a distant French relative of Christopher Columbus, according to information at bocageplantation.com.

The house originally was built on brick pillars extending eight feet above the surface of the ground, like other plantation homes, to protect it from the Mississippi River’s flooding, Rundell said, but the bottom floor was enclosed in the 1830s when it was renovated by James Dakin.

Eventually, the house fell into disrepair, and Rundell said, there are stories that “there were cows grazing inside it when it was purchased by the Crozat family in the 1940s. They are responsible for salvaging the house.”

Dr. Edwin Kohlsdorf, the Crozat family to which Rundell referred includes Dr. Anita Crozat and her husband, Dr. Edwin Kohlsdorf.

The previous owners, Margot Genre Turk and Jean Lorio, are great-great nieces of Dr. Anita Crozat.

Margot Genre Turk said she grew up watching her relatives, the Turk and Houmas House plantations, and spent lots of time at Bocage when her parents, Margaret Lorio and Richard Genre, of Port Allen, owned it.

Rundell said he has no plans to move to Bocage with his wife, Lilya, and 18-month-old son, Alexander, but he does eventually want to develop the rest of the property, maybe with a subdivision, on 80 of the 100 acres.