

# REAL ESTATE

COVERING THE METROPOLITAN MARKET

A sleepy street in Uptown New Orleans is one of the city's most stylish, writer Roger Green says. Page 3

A Jefferson family has built their dream home in the Chateau Estates subdivision. Page 5.

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## Sprawling site of former Pine Hills Hotel in Bay St. Louis

Louisiana partnership is planning condominiums, townhouses on site of once elegant Mississippi coast hotel

# Dormant site revived on Miss. coast

By LETTICE STUART  
Staff writer

BAY ST. LOUIS, Miss. — The abandoned Pine Hills Hotel on the north shore of Bay St. Louis has been purchased by a group of Louisiana investors who are in the process of converting the property into condominiums and townhouses.

The mammoth structure — a familiar sight to motorists crossing the Bay St. Louis bridge — surrounded by 83 acres of land, was purchased in January 1981 by a partnership of 20 investors. The Southern Scottish Inns Inc. motel chain is one of the investors and owns one-fifth of the property.

Harry Geller of Geller Investment Inc. of Ocean Springs, Miss., said plans call for conversion of the 180-room hotel structure into 70 to 75 condominiums, the construction of 300 to 400 townhouse units and the restoration of the beach, marina and tennis courts located on the property. Geller, president of the partnership that purchased the property, added that the property may be sold at any stage of the development. The current price tag is \$1.5 million. As work progresses, the price will increase, he said.

The Gulf Coast property has historical significance. The site was first described by one of Iberville's lieutenants, the Comte de Lisle, who explored Bay St. Louis in August 1700 —

shortly after Iberville established the first French settlement on the Mississippi Gulf Coast at Ocean Springs.

de Lisle wrote in his diary of filling drinking water casks from his ship at a spring on the site. The site also was a camping ground for the Choctaw Indians.

In 1845, William Alexander Whitfield built Shelly Plantation on the site. Around the turn of the century the site became a nursery.

IN 1925, A PORTION of the Shelly Plantation site was purchased by a group of New Orleans businessmen. First they built an 18-hole golf course and a \$75,000 clubhouse to attract their wealthy friends from New Orleans. Shortly afterward, they built the Pine Hills Hotel, a \$1,350,000, 6-story structure facing the bay. A sand beach was put on the shore in front of the hotel.

Pine Hills opened on December 20, 1926. It was the ultimate in elegance and luxury on the Gulf Coast with \$200,000 worth of furnishings. The 180 private rooms had Persian rugs and tile baths. A cypress-beamed lounge led through a ceramic tiled lobby down into a french-windowed dining room.

The wealthy elite of New Orleans and surrounding areas flocked to Pine Hills and business boomed. A stock ticker tape machine was installed in the hotel to handle the stock interests of the wealthy clients.

The heyday of Pine Hills was shortlived, though. In 1928, U.S. 90, originally planned to skirt the bay, was instead routed by bridge across the bay nine miles south of the hotel.

Deemed inaccessible, Pine Hills was forced to close after only three years in operation when the stock market crashed in 1929 and the once-wealthy clients no longer could afford the hotel's luxurious lifestyle.

The building remained vacant until 1953, inhabited only by Army troops for six months in 1942.

IN 1953, THE PROPERTY was purchased by the Oblate Fathers and renovated into an Oblate major seminary. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, founded near Marseilles, France, in 1816, are the fifth largest missionary order in the world. The Oblate Fathers comprise the staff of the St. Louis Cathedral and also are the spiritual directors of St. Mary's Italian Church and Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in New Orleans.

The priests closed the site in 1968 and moved to St. Louis, where the seminary could be located near college facilities. The property was put on the market for \$675,000, but there were no takers.

Construction of Interstate 10 about a mile from the entrance gate has once again stimulated interest in the property.

The new owners buy problem properties, described by Geller as "abandoned jewels," and

clean them up for resale. Geller says the partners are moving ahead with plans to convert the property into a condominium/townhouse complex, to be called Shelly Plantation — but will sell the property at any stage of the development.

"Right now we're just cleaning the place up," Geller said. The building, though structurally sound, has fallen into disrepair and was badly vandalized, according to Geller. "Everything in the building was stolen, even the doorknobs."

"We're starting with the top floor, which has been gutted, in order to make larger rooms, and will work our way down," Geller said.

THE OLD HOTEL building, which originally had 180 rooms and 130 baths, will be converted into 70 to 75 two-bedroom, two-bath condominium units.

The condominiums will sell for approximately \$85,000, Geller said. Many people, particularly retired couples from New Orleans who remember visiting Pine Hills Hotel in their childhood, already have expressed an interest in purchasing the condominiums, according to the developers.

The second stage of development will include construction of 300 to 400 townhouse units on the 83 acres of ground surrounding the old hotel.

The developers would not speculate on the price of these units.