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Times-Picayune (New Orleans, LA)

June 5, 2003 Thursday

SECTION: LIVING; Chris Rose; Pg. 1

LENGTH: 677 words

HEADLINE: These Old Houses;
Life hasn't gone on for the Belfort Mansion and the Scheinuk the Florist shop

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BODY:
I was down on The Avenue, soaking in the beautiful sunshine and ambiance and architecture, when I noticed that the windows of Scheinuk the Florist looked mighty bare.

I walked up to the door and it was locked. Inside, the place was cleared out.

What about the bunnies? I thought.

Scheinuk, of course, is the beautiful old flower shop with the glass greenhouse in the Garden District where, every Easter, the proprietors fenced in the yard and put a bunch of white bunnies out to play, to the squealing delight of local children.

I've got young kids now. Whereas the most important things in my life used to be tequila, skinny ties and bad New Wave music, things like Jell-O, puzzles with oversize pieces and bunnies are very high on my list now.

Priorities change. Life goes on.

So anyway. I knock on the door at Scheinuk and this guy opens it part-way and says: Yeah?

Me: It looks like you're closing.

Him: We are.

Me: What about the bunnies?

Him: What about them?

Me: Where are they?

Him: I ate them.

Me: You ate them?

Him: Yeah, ask Frank Davis about it. We made a fricassee.

And thus was the end of my conversation with Donnie Scheinuk. I'm pretty sure he was kidding about the fricassee part, but then again, I don't know Donnie very well.

This part I do know: His classic old flower shop is closed and maybe this isn't a surprise to you. In fact, a review of old

Times-Picayune clippings revealed to me a very small item from last November that said the City Planning Commission had approved demolition of the flower shop and greenhouse and also given approval to a condominium project on the site.

Shame, that. Scheinuk the Florist, with its classic commercial lines and old red neon light, has always been one of my favorite buildings on our grand boulevard.

Another institution gone to neighborhood progress. And so it goes.

I was in Scheinuk's neighborhood because I had been trying to figure out what's going on at the Belfort Mansion, there in the middle of the 2600 block.

The Belfort, as all of you who wear Skechers know, was the domicile of the cast and crew of "Real World New Orleans," which aired on MTV in the summer of 2000.

The day that production folded its tents and left town, the Belfort immediately took on the appearance of a dilapidated old dump (amazing what lighting can do to a facade!).

Since then, the renovation project seems to be rivaling only those of the State Supreme Court building and the Broad Street pumping station for longevity. Despite the fact that workers have been on the premises constantly for three years, the place looks today exactly like it did in the summer of 2000.

Now, since the mansion has reverted to a private residence, perhaps the status of the Belfort is none of my business -- or yours. But I had told myself that once the one-thousandth person asked me what was going on at that house, I would look into the matter and get an answer.

Well, I looked into the matter and didn't get an answer. The contractors and workers on the site are mum. So I called the property owner, **Jim Perrier**, who owns Perrier Party Rentals. In fact, I called him a whole bunch of times. But he never returned my calls.

Good thing I wasn't trying to book a tent for a wedding or I would have been up a creek, huh?

Anyway, it's still a tourist hot spot, the Belfort is. Dozens of folks stop by daily, pausing to take pictures of what is now -- odd how this works -- one of the most famous houses in New Orleans.

Tough to beat MTV for exposure. In fact, at one point, a tourism official told me that, for callers from out of state, the Belfort Mansion was the second most inquired-about tourism destination in the city after the D-Day Museum.

Right next door to the flower shop that will be all but forgotten by next Easter.

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Catch Chris Rose live on the Web each Tuesday afternoon at 3, or leave a comment anytime in the Chris Rose forum, both at www.nola.com. You can e-mail noroses@bellsouth.net; call (504) 826-3309 or (504) 352-2535; or fax to 826-3186.

LOAD-DATE: June 6, 2003
