

# Firm opens talks for plantation

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To the outrage of preservationists and environmentalists, Formosa Plastics Corp. has opened negotiations to buy Evergreen Plantation on St. John the Baptist Parish's west bank.

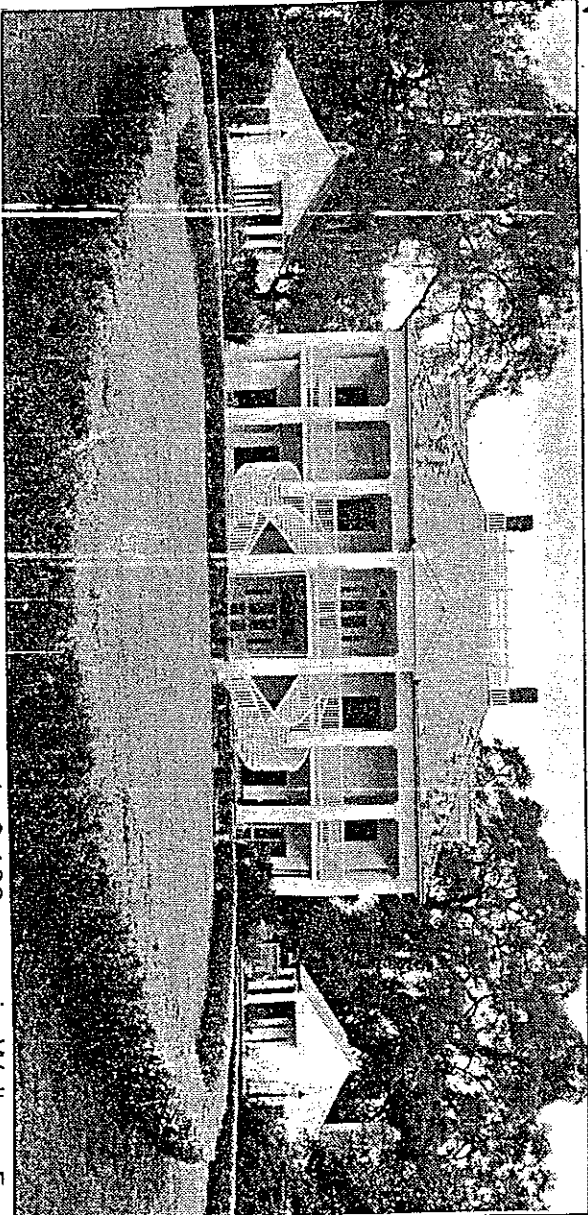
A Formosa official, however, said any purchase is far in the future. The company entered negotiations after being contacted by the plantation's owner, he said.

"They approached us," said Alden Andre, a Formosa vice president. "We've had some preliminary discussion. It's been a long time since we last talked. Months. We made a proposal and they made a proposal."

Last year, Formosa announced plans to build a rayon and petrochemical plant on the 1,700-acre Whitney Plantation site in Wallace, which borders Evergreen to the west. The announcement, and the Parish Council's rezoning to accommodate the plant, touched off a firestorm of controversy pitting environmentalists against company executives, parish officials and local businessmen. Environmentalists say the company is a polluter; Formosa's supporters say it will bring jobs to the impoverished west bank.

Opponents have filed suit challenging the rezoning. Evergreen encompasses nearly 2,100 acres in Wallace. Historical accounts say the house, a white, ball-columned structure with a double staircase in front, two fireplaces and a widow's walk, was built in 1840.

Company and parish officials have pledged to renovate the Whitney Plantation house, now fenced off and in disrepair. Andre



Evergreen Plantation, built in 1840, encompasses nearly 2,100 acres in Wallace. Formosa Plastics Corp. is entering negotiations to buy the house.

STAFF PHOTO BY LESLIE WHITE

said that if the company buys Evergreen, the house would be preserved and opened to the public. Evergreen is currently closed to the public.

But the prospect of another River Road plantation home owned by industry doesn't sit well with preservationists. They criticize Formosa for endangering a "green belt" devoid of heavy industry on St. John's west bank.

The River Road is the second-most desirable area for visitors to south Louisiana, behind New Orleans, said Zeb Mayhew, an administrator of Oak Alley Plantation in Vacherie, La., west of Wallace. "How people can want to ruin that, I can't fathom," Mayhew said.

Evergreen owner Matilda Stream initiated the talks in November, Andre said.

Stream's attorney, James Cole-

man Sr. of New Orleans, has indicated that Formosa's proposed Whitney location is behind the sale negotiations.

"Once this plant is constructed, Evergreen is worthless as a residence," Coleman told Environmental Protection Agency officials Thursday night during a hearing on Formosa's rayon plant proposal. "Evergreen comes out of operation."

Coleman would not elaborate on his statements. Stream, who maintains homes in New Orleans and Lake Charles, is out of town and not available for comment, a secretary said.

Andre said Stream asked "in excess of \$20 million" for the plantation but would not discuss specific figures. Blanche Lovelly of the River Road Restoration Coalition said she heard that Formosa offered \$8 million for Evergreen.

"It's worth that much to them," Andre said of Stream's asking price. "But not to us. We're not in the antebellum home business."

He said Formosa's interest in the Evergreen property is "just to add some more buffer zone. At this time, if the price is right, we'd buy more land."

Historians have pointed to Evergreen as one of the few plantations with many of its support structures — slave quarters — still intact.

"Most don't have the outer buildings," said Natchez, Miss., resident J. Wesley Cooper, who studied Evergreen for his 1961 book "A Treasury of Louisiana Plantation Homes."

"This gives a historical glimpse of plantation life, including slavery. That's very much a part of Louisiana and the U.S.," he said.