

Anita's Garden buys its building

Written by MARK JAEGER

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No longer leasing from Port parish, owners plan property improvements

The name on the deed has changed at Anita's Garden, but not the familiar faces or the cozy atmosphere at the assisted-living facility in Port Washington.

After leasing the former rectory at 117 E. Van Buren St. from St. Mary's Parish since 2006, owners Kathleen Mahoney and Bridgette Benavides have purchased the building that houses the 19-bed senior residential facility.

"This is something we have been talking with the church about for two or three years. It was always our goal to own the building," Benavides said.

"I think we've become a part of the community. It had gotten to the point where if we couldn't buy the building, we were going to have to look at relocating. We like it here and really didn't want to leave."

Benavides said their relationship with the parish has always been good. Still, she noted, it will be much easier to make improvements on the building now that they own it.

"When we started this business and long before we even thought about buying the building, Kathy and I put our life savings, \$180,000, into making improvements and bringing it up to code for use as an assisted-living facility," she said.

Mahoney said they used their own money to make safety improvements to the building before they owned it, including installing a sprinkler system and "wander guards" on doors, as well as making bathrooms ADA compliant.

"Our accountant said we couldn't keep spending money on rent, but if it came down to it, I know I would have fought the idea of leaving here. It has become our home and a real labor of love," Benavides said.

Their lease on the building was scheduled to expire next March.

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