Albania Mansion rescued from decay

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SPECIAL TO THE DAILY IBERIAN

If Charles A. Grevemberg could return to the stately mansion he constructed in the early 1840s, he would find the appearance has changed very little over the years.

Albania Mansion, built by Grevemberg between 1837 and 1842, proved to be more than just a perfect setting for the first Jeanerette Chamber of Commerce business after hours gathering of the year.

The recent event, hosted by Hunt Sionem and sponsored by First National Bank of Jeanerette, provided an opportunity for guests to not only exchange business ideas, but to step back in time as they toured the antebellum home and mingled under the moss-draped oak trees.

The unusually large two-and-a-half story Greek revival plantation home

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ALBANIA: Artist has love for Southern homes


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inal furnishings that once graced the mansion.

“You have no idea what this means to me. It’s wonderful just to be able to tour the home and to see that it is restored,” said Nolan.

In less than two years, Sionem has given a new breath of life to the old mansion. When Sionem acquired the property in 2004 from the estate of Emily Cyr Bridges, the home and grounds were shadowed by years gone by. Neglect had taken a heavy toll on the once stately mansion.

Sionem’s love for the south and passion for old homes quickly changed all that. After extensive renovations, the mansion has been restored to its former glory.

Butch Bailey, a friend of Sionem and property manager involved in the renovations, called the restoration project a true labor of love.

“Albania is such a unique piece of property and is considered to be one of the larger plantation homes in Louisiana. It is one of the most important and significant historical properties in the region,” Bailey said.

“Hunt was sorry he couldn’t be here for the gathering and sent his apologies, but said he was happy to open Albania to the Jeanerette Chamber.”

The private home is listed on the National Register of Historic Places but is not open for public viewing.

Sionem, a world-renowned contemporary artist with exhibits across the world, developed his interest in the south while studying art at Tulane University.

The 54-year-old artist has had more than 170 solo exhibitions since his first professional showing at New York’s Fishbach Gallery in 1977 at the age of 24. His work is included in more than 50 museum collections.

“He has a genuine love and interest in Southern plantation homes and furnishing,” said Bailey. “It’s wonderful to put the time, effort and resources into preserving the treasures of Louisiana.”

Although none of the contents are original to the home, Sionem selected furnishings of the same era.

“It has always been my dream to see the inside of this home,” said Monica Fitch, Jeanerette Chamber of Commerce vice president.

“It just feels wonderful to know that he has restored part of Jeanerette’s history. Jeanerette has lost so much already, and it’s wonderful to know that we won’t lose this beautiful old mansion.”

One could never doubt Sionem’s passion for old homes. He is just as well-known for bringing a breath of new life into an old home as he is for the hallmark imagery of birds in his colorful paintings.

In 2001, Sionem purchased and restored Cord’s Mansion in Kingston, N.Y., located high above a bend along the Hudson River.

Sionem seems to be drawn to southern plantation homes and the need to bring them back to life. Sionem and Bailey are currently working on the restoration of his most recent purchase of Lakeside Plantation near New Roads.

Albania Mansion drew much attention in the spring of 2005 when it was used in the filming of ‘All the King’s Men.’ The movie is scheduled for release in September.