



Everything New Orleans

## **Alderwoods selling 4 local funeral homes** **Katrina-damaged Bultman parlor among casualties**

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**By Greg Thomas**  
**Real estate writer**

Bultman Funeral Home, the iconic St. Charles Avenue building best-known as the House of Bultman, closed its doors two weeks ago and will be sold along with three other local funeral homes owned by the Alderwoods Group Inc. of Toronto.

Alderwoods, which is in the process of being acquired by Service Corp. International of Houston, is selling off some of its Katrina-damaged properties and consolidating operations to the Jacob Schoen & Son Funeral Home it owns at 3827 Canal St.

"Our flagship funeral home will be Schoen Funeral Home on Canal Street," Alderwoods Chief Financial Officer Ken Sloan said, adding that changes in the market and in the way people want to be memorialized made operating two flagship homes economically inefficient.

In addition to the Bultman home on St. Charles Avenue, Alderwoods is selling the Schoen Funeral Home in Slidell on Pontchartrain Drive, the Tharp Funeral Home, Mid-City on Moss Street, the Tharp-Sontheimer-Tharp Funeral Home on South Claiborne Avenue in New Orleans, and a limousine and floral operation.

The Bultman home, acquired by Alderwoods in the 1990s, has operated under some version of the Bultman family name for 123 years. It has hosted services for numerous historical figures ranging from Confederate President Jefferson Davis to 1950s actress Jayne Mansfield. In recent years, funerals for oil tycoon Patrick Taylor and poet and painter Stan Rice, the husband of author Anne Rice, have been held at Bultman, a sprawling complex filled with art collected by the Bultman family.

Billy Henry, who has managed Bultman for 16 years, said the funeral home sustained damage during Hurricane Katrina that would be expensive to repair.

Renovating the property also would be expensive because the building is governed by Historic District Landmarks Commission guidelines, Sloan said. The home is not a landmark itself because it is actually three townhomes tied together, but because it is located in a historic district, it has to follow HDLC guidelines for exterior changes or repairs.

Lewis Stirling, a broker and developer with Stirling Properties Inc., is lead partner in the acquisition of the Alderwoods sites. Stirling, doing business as Stirling-Forterva LLC, declined to give a purchase price.

Though Alderwoods has owned Bultman for some time, many New Orleanians still considered it to be a homegrown institution.

"It's really torn me," said Henry, who has been spending his time dealing with families that have traditionally used Bultman for generations and are floored to hear that the operation is closed. He is staying on before taking over as director at Tharp-Sontheimer-Tharp Funeral Home on Causeway Boulevard in Metairie, which Alderwoods also owns.

Despite the planned closure of several of its local holdings, Alderwoods will retain a local market presence.

Besides Jacob Schoen on Canal Street and Tharp-Sontheimer-Tharp on Causeway Boulevard, the company owns the Garden of Memories cemetery in Metairie, where it is nearing the completion of a new funeral home. Alderwoods also has Westside/Leitz Eagan on the West Bank Expressway in Marrero, Lamana-Panno-Fallo on Veterans Memorial Boulevard in Metairie, Tharp Funeral Home on Chef Menteur Highway in Gentilly, Leitz-Eagan Funeral Home on Veterans in Metairie and Schoen Funeral Home in Covington.

Stephen Sontheimer, who joined Bultman in 1962 and serves as a consultant for Alderwoods, said he is saddened by Bultman's closure.

However, he said he accepts the changing nature of the funeral home business.

He said Alderwoods will be bringing new concepts into the market to meet new trends in the death care industry.

For example, cremation is growing in popularity, and clients are increasingly interested in holding memorial services in special places other than funeral homes. Alderwoods -- and later Service Corp. International -- will work to meet those needs.

"There are new opportunities, especially with the new company (Service Corp.). The industry is changing, just as New Orleans is a changing place," Sontheimer said from Maine, where he is vacationing.

Though Bultman is in the process of closing, a piece of it may live on. In an upstairs storage area are numerous shelves of hardbound volumes recording every funeral held at the St. Charles location, dating back to the 1920s. The books contain obituaries from The States-Item and The Times-Picayune plus detailed records on services. The Historic New Orleans Collection is interested in acquiring and preserving the records because of their wealth of historic and genealogical details.

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