

Island's first motel is 60 years old

This is one in an ongoing series of articles on people, places and events that shaped Island history. Each year, The Sun will highlight the people who made an impact, the events that occurred and the structures that were built in the same year from 20 to 100 years ago with stories and photos.

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ANNA MARIA – In 1949, Carlos and Irene Wells built the Island's first motel at the end of North Bay Boulevard with six units and an unobstructed view of the Gulf.

A year later, when Paul Carlisle retired from the DuPont Company, he and his wife, Norene, wanted to find a place to retire where their families could come to visit. They found Anna Maria and fell in love, purchasing the motel for \$27,500.

"After they bought the motel, they added two more units," daughter Margaret Chapman recalled. "And they bought the house next door and added a living room, carport and office."

"DuPont gave dad a television and they would invite guests and neighbors to come watch television with them because very few people had televisions then."

Chapman said rooms rented for \$5 a night and included a newspaper and a grapefruit on the doorstep every morning.

Paul Carlisle was very civic minded and in 1952, he became president of the Island Chamber of commerce and served on several Island committees for roads, bridges and the public beach. In 1954, he was elected mayor of Anna Maria.

According to a 1956 newspaper article,



"He gave all his time to the office. Hours meant nothing. He was profligate with his mental and physical energy."

"He was the soul of honesty and integrity; entirely devoted to the people he served and had a fine conception of his responsibilities and duties."

Chapman said in 1956, she and her husband had moved to Puerto Rico.

"I was expecting a baby," Chapman said. "Mom came to help and dad came with her. He got sick, went to the hospital and died at the age of 69."

"Mom was a wreck for three years, but went right on running the motel until 1981 when she was 91. In 1980 I bought this cottage across the street from the motel and moved here permanently. When mom died, I took over the motel."

Chapman remodeled and modernized the motel and continued to run it until 1989, when she sold it to a couple that replaced the shuffleboard courts with a swimming pool. It has changed hands a couple of times since then and is currently owned by Dan and Christine Horvat.

"We're trying to accentuate the fact that it's a historical landmark," Manager Troy Seim said. "I made a collage of photographs to let people know about its history."

However Chapman stressed, "It will always be in my heart. It will always be my motel."



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARGARET CHAPMAN

Above, the Pullman kitchens in the rooms contained an oven above, a stove and sink in the middle and refrigerator below in one compact unit. Below, an aerial view of the motel in the 1950s.



PHOTO/ANNA MARIA COPELAND

Above, the motel in 2009 is hidden from view by trees and foliage. At right is the same view of the motel in the 1950s.



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