

Former Darkchild Recording Studios site turning into funeral home

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PLEASANTVILLE — The former Darkchild Recording Studios building, where songwriters and producers Rodney Jerkins and his brother Fred Jerkins III made music magic, will now house the dreams of Thomas Jennings.

After sitting dormant for about a decade, the recording studio at Route 9 and Doughty Road is being transformed into a funeral home for Jennings, of Galloway Township, who has 27 years of experience after working for the Greenidge Funeral Home Atlantic City until 2014.

This will be the first time in his 40 years as a working adult that Jennings, 58, will be his own boss.

“I always thought this would be a perfect location for a funeral home, so that was my interest in purchasing it,” said Jennings, who added it will be called Jennings Funeral Home. “I always had the thought and the desire to open my own funeral home. ... It’s a good feeling. It’s a great feeling.”

The building and the site is one of the most prominent in the city.

It was originally known as the site of the old Martin’s General Store before the Jerkins’ bought it in 1998 for \$300,000 after scoring their first No. 1 pop hit.

The Jerkins brothers, formerly of Galloway Township, are Grammy winners, who have earned No. 1 pop singles with such songs as “The Boy Is Mine” in 1998, their first No. 1 single, sung by Brandy and Monica, and “Say My Name” in 1999, which was sung by Beyonce’s former group, Destiny’s Child.

While the studio was open, music stars including Brandy, Lionel Richie and Jordan Knight of New Kids on the Block and the late Michael Jackson either recorded there or visited.

A memorial was set up on the black fence that surrounded the studio where fans could pay their respects when Jackson died unexpectedly in 2009.

The studio was put up for sale in 2003 after Rodney Jerkins opened recording studios where he had homes in Los Angeles and Florida. Rodney Jerkins, now 40, continues to work with current hit makers such as Justin Bieber, Sam Smith and Maroon 5.

Rodney’s brother, Fred Jerkins III, 47, who now lives in Atlanta, estimated the studio stopped by being used all together by 2009. He helped facilitate the deal and described Jennings as a good friend for whom he is excited.

Jennings knew the Jerkins family because from their mutual involvement in the church. Rodney and Fred III’s father is Bishop Dr. Fred Jerkins Jr. of the Evangelical Fellowship Church, next to the recording studio.

Jennings is the minister of music at Second Baptist Church in Atlantic City.

In May 2016, Jennings brought the property. The property was worked on until October 2016. Work on the property resumed last month. A combination of waiting for approvals and refinancing caused the delay, he said.

Jennings is investing more than \$1 million in the property, through the combination of buying the site and the building and the conversion of the building into a funeral home, which is currently taking place.

Nothing that used to be on the first floor, including recording studios B and C, still exists. Even the freight elevator to carry objects from the old Martin's General Store days is coming out.

By summer, the funeral home will be operational, Jennings said. He added his wife of 37 years, Cynthia, will help out as will his daughter, Chaia, who is a guidance counselor in the Atlantic City public schools.

"I would really hope to gain customers from the whole Atlantic County area and even those closer to the borders of Atlantic County," Jennings said. "Everyone deserves choices."