Prime property saved near Fort Frederica

Twenty acres of pristine forest and marshland on the north side of the Fort Frederica National Monument is on its way to perpetual preservation, thanks to an innovative agreement spearheaded by the St. Simons Land Trust.

When Land Trust President Russ Marane learned that developers were showing interest in the historic property, he got the go-ahead from then-owner Sea Island Company to develop a plan to preserve the parcel in its natural state. The Land Trust plan involves county, state and federal governments, with the property ultimately winding up in the hands of the National Park Service's Fort Frederica National Monument.

“The Land Trust may need to hold the property for three

Continued on page 4
The Oyster Roast was “a smaller deal” the first few years, says Bennie’s owner Denise Gentile, who has been involved since the beginning. By the time Gentile enlisted Charlie Williams of Crabbaddy’s to join up four years ago, the road had become the largest such event on St. Simons.

The question then became, How to steam so many oysters? Williams found a cornerman through a friend of his dad’s that will steam 400 pounds of oysters at a time. The cooker is cranked up about an hour ahead of time, and the two restaurateurs, their staffs, friends and family go to work.

The price of success

By 7 o’clock, the oysters are ready. So are some 800 hungry partygoers. Lines for the oysters start snaking around the park.

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A farewell from Michelle Pugliese

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The Oyster Roaster’s

The annual Oyster Roast menu is extensive. Low Country Bait, specialty hors d’oeuvres, scrumptious desserts. But the heart of the menu is the oysters, themselves – laid down and shipped from the season’s choicest location in the Gulf of Mexico.

It takes some 20 bushels of oysters to feed the 800 guests at the Oyster Roast. And every bushel is generously donated by two island restaurants, Bennie’s, Red Barn and Crabbaddy’s.

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Tale of two islands
On not becoming ‘another Hilton Head’

To St. Simons Islanders, Hilton Head Island has long been the poster child for rampant over-development on a barrier island. So when Russ Marane moved from Hilton Head to St. Simons a year ago to take over the St. Simons Land Trust, he got an earful from his new island neighbors. What Russ knew, however, was that Hilton Head had gotten control of inappropriate development more than 20 years ago and since then has spent some $130 million reclaiming its natural beauty.

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, Hilton Head epitomizes the best – and the worst – of island development. What had started as responsible planned development in the 1970s turned into rapid, unplanned growth by the 1980s. Since then, Hilton Head has relied on a mix of public funding, special taxes, grants, and private philanthropy to preserve green spaces, tear down old construction to provide more open space, and develop parks.

To show off some of the forests, parks and marsh-side land he helped preserve during his tenure as project manager for South Carolina and Georgia coastal programs for the Trust for Public Land, Russ planned a summer field trip to Hilton Head and Beaufort County. Invited along: Land Trust staff, producers of this newsletter, and a reporter and photographer from Golden Isles Magazine.

We met up in Bluffton early one morning, piled into a van, and sat back to await the ugly overdevelopment we all expected to see. We never saw it. Instead, we saw an extensive system of active and passive parks on conservation lands, miles of nature and bike trails, forests, open space with marsh views in the middle of commercial development, and beautiful buffers of trees and shrubbery hiding everything from Wendy’s to Wal-Mart. Discreet, attractive signs in front of the bufflers let passersby know the stores were there.

We also met with Town Manager Steve Riley, who noted Hilton Head’s philosophy: “We can’t stop development if we buy the land.” The town, he said, will buy any property that goes on the market if it will beautify the island, prevent curbs cuts on the main road, Hwy. 27, or preserve any natural beauty and marsh vistas. The result is that 14 of 24 miles on Hwy. 27 is now forever green.

Can St. Simons see results like this? Our island today faces the same growth pressures that Hilton Head faced years ago. Russ says. Several organizations are working to preserve the character of coastal Georgia, including the Land Trust. Yet, the escalation of land prices is forcing the need for an additional source of funds, he says. “Like other land trusts across the nation, we have to seek out sources of public funding to supplement the money given by our 2,000 dedicated members. Our primary focus is to preserve the scenic quality of the island, and I’d like to see us preserve more property with real conservation values.”

Prime property saved
Continued from page 1

you’re possibly longer,” Marane says. “We are also currently in discussions with the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national nonprofit land conservation organization, about partnering with us. TPL has an office in Washington, D.C., and can assist with us. TPL has an office in

Mary Beth Wester, new superintendent at Fort Frederica, noted that significant prehistoric archaeological features may exist on the property, as well as natural assets. These – including a large Native American shell midden that could date back as far as 3000 BC – would be protected and potentially viewed by the public. The property acquisition will also protect the northernmost pl plain of the fort from the visual impact of development, she said. The tabby ruins of soldiers’ barracks at the fort is so close to the property line of the preserved land that any homes that might have been built there would have destroyed the 18th century feel of the national monument.

“Preserving this beautiful and historic land for future generations is the right decision for Glynn County and for Georgia,” said Rep. Jerry Keen. “I am pleased that we have all been able to work together to protect this pristine site for years to come.”

Noted County Commissioner Tony Thaw, whose district includes Fort Frederica. “This 20 acres is a very developable piece of land. Another 100 units could have been built if it were zoned multi-family. And if it were zoned for six or 12 houses per acre, it still would have been a major development.”

Stade noted that “Glynn County’s assistance in securing a $750,000 grant and a low-interest loan from the state of Georgia’s Land Conservation Program was an essential element of the deal.”

The Land Trust Board noted that the property acquisition meets the organization’s mission in several ways:

• Preserving a historic site
• Preserving the scenic character of a significant land mass
• Supporting the Land Trust’s Greenprint as a site in the mid-island History Corridor
• Expanding the public’s access to open space on the island.

SAVING A HISTORIC PROPERTY STEP BY STEP

• The Land Trust completed purchase of 20 acres adjacent to Fort Frederica on Aug. 31 from the Sea Island Company for $3.5 million – a price below its market value – using borrowed funds.

• Meanwhile, the Glynn County Commission, on the recommendation of the county Greenspace Committee, sought a land conservation grant and a low-interest loan from the Georgia Land Conservation Program. That program approved a $756,000 grant and a $2.75 million loan to the county on Sept. 11.

• When the county receives the conservation funds, it will transfer the money to the Land Trust so that the organization can retire its debt. The Land Trust will enter into a binding agreement with the county to pay the required debt service on the county’s loan with the state of Georgia so that no county funds will be used for the project.

• The Land Trust’s next step is to seek the assistance of Rep. Jack Kingston and the Georgia delegation to develop legislation for a boundary revision to include the new acreage within the park boundary and to obtain federal funding to recover its costs of acquiring and holding the property.

• Ultimately, when federal funds become available, the Land Trust will transfer the property to the National Park Service.
**The Land Trust News**

**The Land Trust welcomes new members who have joined us in 2007. We're especially pleased to announce that the Land Trust's Live Oak Society has topped 400 members!**

Add-ons add up to a Community Partnership Program update

For the past couple of years, two Village businesses – Barbara Jean's Restaurant and the Village Inn and Pub – have encouraged their guests to contribute to the St. Simons Land Trust on their bills. How has it been working out?

At the Village Inn and Pub, “we automatically add one dollar to every guest room night,” says General Manager Kristy Wilkes. “We'll take it off at the check-out if a guest requests it. But that rarely happens. It's only if we have business customers who have to turn in [an itemized] receipt.”

Wilkes says a lot of guests read the history of the inn, including how the owners spared all of the trees when they see the property as natural as possible. When they see the rapid growth on the island, “a lot of them say it’s nice to have some of that serene nature left on St. Simons.” Wilkes says she takes great pride in contributing and talks up the Land Trust at every opportunity.

At Barbara Jean’s, where the organization does things for the right reason. “I want the organization to do business because I believe in their efforts.”

The Land Trust promises to preserve the island’s natural and scenic character and to enhance the quality of life of our island community for present and future generations.

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912-638-9185
Dana Pope, Director of Development & Membership
912-638-9185
Oak Pearson, Administrative Assistant
912-638-9185

**Newsletter editing, design**

Lemarté & Lankton Communications Inc.

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Russ Marane, Staff
Bob Algood

**Project Review Committees**

Ray Robison – Staff
Don Myers

**All gifts to the Land Trust are tax deductible**

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Fresh, steamed oysters and Low Country Boil....

featuring wild-caught shrimp, and coastal fare from leading Golden Isles restaurants are expected to draw more than 800 people to the eighth annual Oyster Roast, scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 17, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Once again, the gala event will be held under the live oaks at the historic Fort Frederica National Monument. Eighteenth-century entertainment will be provided by the musical group, Malarky.

“The Oyster Roast is our way of saying thank-you to members,” said committee chair Sherri Jones. “It’s an opportunity for members to be together at a real community event.”

Tickets for members are $45; for non-members, $55. Be sure to order your tickets well before the 17th as they are expected to sell out. For more information, call 638-9109.

OYSTER ROAST SET FOR NOVEMBER 17

You and the St. Simons Land Trust

When you join the St. Simons Land Trust, you become part of the premier organization on St. Simons Island. Your membership enables us to pursue our vision of protecting the natural and scenic character of our island community and its quality of life. As a member, you receive a Land Trust decal, the newsletter, invitations to special events, and the opportunity to volunteer for special projects. Our members play a vital role in supporting our daily operations as well as our outreach and awareness programs. Please join us in protecting the things we all love about St. Simons Island. The Land Trust is a non-profit organization, and all gifts are tax-deductible.