

Adirondack Daily Enterprise



Friends group will buy Eagle Island

SARANAC LAKE – A nonprofit group expects to soon purchase the summer camp it has spent years trying to obtain, thanks to an anonymous donor.



Friends of Eagle Island, Inc. announced in a press release Sept. 17 it had reached an agreement in principle to acquire Eagle Island on Upper Saranac Lake from the Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council.

The release stated the friends group was able to make the purchase through “the extraordinary generosity of an anonymous donor whose gift ensures that ‘children may always play’ on Eagle Island,” which served as an active Girl Scout camp from 1938 to 2008.

“We have signed a contract,” Friends of Eagle Island Vice President Chris Wubbolding told the Enterprise, adding that she was not at liberty to discuss

the terms of the agreement publicly. Jennifer Thompson, the chief marketing and communications officer of the Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council, said the council is not in a position to comment on the sale at this time.

Wubbolding said the group hopes to repair the camp and make it a youth summer camp once again, in some form.

“There needs to be some restoration to some of the historic buildings,” she said. “They’re in great shape considering their age and the fact that there has not been a lot of maintenance in the past couple of years, but we are aware that there are some things that have to be taken care of, so that is our first step.

“Our second step is to try to re-establish it in some form as a youth camp, but that is still something that is going to take some time to put together.”

“We are absolutely delighted with this outcome and the opportunity to conserve Eagle Island, preserve the Historic Landmark buildings, and restore the property for youth camping and the public,” Friends of Eagle Island President Dorcas Hardy said in the release. “We are grateful to the generosity of our donor and appreciate the willingness of the Girl Scouts to work with us to achieve this worthwhile purpose.”

History

The 32-acre estate on Eagle Island was built in 1903 for former U.S. Vice President Levi P. Morton. The complex consists of 11 buildings designed by renowned Adirondack architect William Coulter.

It became a Girl Scout camp in 1938 after the Henry Graves family of Orange, New Jersey, gave the island to the Maplewood-South Orange New Jersey Girl Scout Council. That branch eventually became the Girl Scout Council of Greater Essex County, New Jersey, which merged with a Hudson County council in the late 1990s. The camp was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, and in 2004 the property was named a National Historic Landmark. Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey took it over and closed the camp for repairs in 2009. The council announced its intent to sell the property in 2010.

Friends of Eagle Island

Friends of Eagle Island incorporated in March 2011 and was soon granted 501(c)3 status. Wubbolding said it has many supporters.

“Our core is campers, counselors, staff and alumni in general, but we do have quite a following outside of that, people who are passionate about the Adirondacks and passionate about the historic landmark,” she said.

Wubbolding said the group hopes to restore and repair the camp.

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The group held a reunion last weekend, and Wubbolding said many of its members were excited by the news.

“The support was overwhelming,” she said. “We had representations from every generation.”

John Fitch, who splits his time between Upper Saranac Lake and Florida and whose camp has a view of the island, had a son and daughter work at the camp. What he finds most interesting, he said, is that there is “an anonymous donor to a good cause without requiring a name change.” That’s a reference to Upper Saranac Lake resident Joan Weill’s offer of \$20 million to Paul Smith’s College if it renames itself Joan Weill-Paul Smith’s College.

Citing the donor’s intent that “children may always play on that island,” Wubbolding is optimistic about the camp’s future.

“We’re looking forward to making that happen, making that dream come true,” she said.

For more information, visit friendsofeagleisland.org.
