

Friends of Eagle Island talk Sunday

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SARANAC LAKE - If you're curious about the future of Eagle Island, the Friends of Eagle Island would like to talk to you.

The nonprofit group, which purchased the great camp on Upper Saranac Lake from the Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council in November, will host an informal public discussion Sunday at the Town of Santa Clara Community Center featuring a "photo walking tour" slide show, maps and other schematics.

"We want to be a presence in the community," said Friends of Eagle Island Executive Director Paula McGovern. "The point of our meeting is to get to know the community, to let people know who we are and (that) we're going to be in the area.

"That's our goal."

McGovern said the group plans to re-open Eagle Island, which served as an active Girl Scout camp from 1938 to 2008, as a youth summer camp true to its former spirit. McGovern said the new camp will emphasize many of the same activities as the former camp: low-impact camping on platform tents, sailing and canoeing. Since purchasing the property, the group has hired a preservation architect, Carl Stearns of Syracuse's Crawford and Stearns, to begin the restoration. McGovern said it will cost about \$1.5 million to install water, sewer and electrical infrastructure and restore the rest of the camp.

"The buildings themselves are in remarkably good shape for their age," she said, adding that the group is sending about 15 volunteers to the island this weekend to begin renovations. "This weekend is going to be a lot of inventory and cleaning.

"This will really be an assessment of how to (coordinate) these volunteers. We've got some really good people. It's going to be a lot of fun."

To aid its fund-raising efforts, the group launched a crowdfunding campaign through Adirondack Gives April 5 that has raised \$1,185 of its \$2,500 goal to purchase a supply of life jackets for visitors and volunteers during the 2016 work season and beyond.

"This is a test to see how it goes," McGovern said. "We're looking at all different things. We have a very active grants committee writing many, many grant applications. We actually received one from the Cloudsplitter Foundation just recently, and I'm really excited about that.

Fact Box

If you go ...

What: Informal discussion on the future of Eagle Island, hosted by the Friends of Eagle Island, Inc.

Where: Town of Santa Clara Community Center, 5367 state Route 30

When: 3 p.m. Sunday

How much: Free

"Grants, pledges, your basic annual campaign will be going out shortly. We need to raise money, we need to fix buildings, we need to build infrastructure. It's a lot to do , but it's worth it."

McGovern said the group hopes to have campers in for the summer of 2018, but she said restoration efforts will be limited until the group can restore running water and sewer and electrical services.

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 incorporated in March 2011 and was soon granted 501(c)3 status.

For more information, visit www.friendsofeagleisland.org.

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