

# Friends celebrate purchase of Eagle Island

By KIM SMITH DEDAM Press-Republican

Nov 9, 2015

UPPER SARANAC LAKE — It's official — the Friends of Eagle Island group is the proud owner of the historic camp property.

The closing took place Friday, with the great-grandson of the original donor, Henry D. "Buz" Graves Jr. on hand.

The \$2.45 million purchase was accomplished with the help of an anonymous donor, who has followed the mammoth effort launched seven years ago by a group of former campers who formed the non-profit Friends of Eagle Island coalition.

"Cheers could be heard coast to coast," Friends said in a statement celebrating their purchase.

"Of course, we know that if it were not for the generosity of our donor and the tireless efforts of our attorney, Bob Goodsell, and his firm, Post, Polak, Goodsell, MacNeill, & Strauchler, P.A., we would not be celebrating."

## **SHUT DOWN IN 2008**

The Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey shuttered the camp in 2008 after 70 years of continuous operation.

They sought to sell the 29-acre historic Great Camp island, once the home of U.S. Vice President Levi P. Morton.

The camp buildings maintain much of the original design and character created by architect William L. Coulter, a Saranac Lake builder famous for his rustic architecture throughout the Adirondack region.

## **NEVER GAVE UP HOPE**

Dorcas Hardy, president of Friends of Eagle Island Inc., noted the historic return to the island's original use.

"This day has been long awaited, and it's quite amazing that this extraordinary property would, although not directly, come full circle back to the Graves family," Dorcas said in a statement.

"We are so proud of our board and our many supporters who have never given up hope."

The group had challenged Heart of New Jersey's decision to sell and won a Supreme Court ruling that says any proceeds have to be used to benefit outdoor experience for children.

## **OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE**

Eagle Island was gifted to the Girl Scouts in 1938 for \$1 by the Graves family with the provision that it always be used as an outdoor camp.

That is precisely what Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Corp., based in North Branch, N.J., plans to do.

“While we have made the decision to sell Camp Eagle Island, the board remains committed to ensuring that the outdoors, and camping, remain a hallmark of the Girl Scout experience,” Nancy Faulks, president of the New Jersey Girl Scouts Board of Directors, said in a statement.

“The proceeds of this sale will solely be earmarked to further develop the Girl Scouts outdoor experience and support our three remaining camps: Camp DeWitt, Lou Henry Hoover and the Oval.

“While it is never easy to close a camp, we are very happy to see that the Friends of Eagle Island, and the women who grew up in Girl Scouts, are the proud new owners of the camp,” Faulks said.

## **REPAIRS PLANNED**

The transaction puts restoration work squarely on the shoulders of hundreds of former Girl Scouts, who now own Eagle Island.

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In an update to their membership, which extends across the country, Friends said restoration and repairs are planned for water, sewer and electrical infrastructure, along with roofs on some of the buildings.

“It’s not a surprise that the property has been neglected over the last seven years and it requires some immediate attention,” Friends said.

“We have already had an engineer and historic preservationist visit the island to evaluate some of the more pressing needs.

“The historic wooden water tank has collapsed and the water distribution is in very poor shape and likely needs to be entirely replaced.

“The septic system needs new pumps, collection and pipes. The service docks have suffered water damage.

“Finally, the electrical system must be upgraded and several buildings need new roofs. While the majority of the buildings are structurally sound, they require a variety of repairs.”

## **MATCHING MONEY**

A giant step toward funding came as the property changed hands, Friends said.

A second major donor offered \$100,000 in matching funds to raise money needed for repairs and program startup.

Estimates suggest Friends of Eagle Island need an additional \$1.5 million to fully fund the restoration.

The group is looking to raise \$200,000 by Dec. 31.

"We know that the Eagle Island family is large enough and strong enough to hit this goal. We wouldn't have worked so hard the last six years if we didn't," the group said.

## **ACCESS TO ALL GIRLS**

Access to a restored camp use will be for all girls, including Girl Scouts who no longer have a camp property nearby, according to Friends spokeswoman Chris Hildebrand.

"Eagle Island will eventually be a camp available to all the girls around the USA who have lost their Girl Scout camps and will find the opportunity to live on an island and enjoy the wilderness of the High Peaks region and learn from these experiences," she said via social media.

"They will have life-changing summers as we all did, sailing, hiking, camping out, building teamwork and leadership skills.

"And the island will be a friend to all who respect its history, both as a camp and as a National Historic Landmark."

Email Kim Smith Dedam:

[kdedam@pressrepublican.com](mailto:kdedam@pressrepublican.com)