

Chapel Hill buys two tracts of greenspace



DTH/LOGAN PRICE

Town Council member Ed Harrison hikes through Chapel Hill's acquired open space Monday on a trip scheduled by the Greenways Commission.

Town pays \$1M for 23 acres of land

BY KAYLA CARRICK
STAFF WRITER

The town of Chapel Hill's recent preservation of open space at a cost of more than \$1 million will help save green spaces in built-up environment, town officials hope.

They also said they expect the purchase will increase the value of housing adjacent to the land.

The land is 23 acres in the Northside neighborhood and along U.S. 15-501 south of Southern Village.

After obtaining that land from the heirs of the late Leo Merritt, Chapel Hill will own about 740 acres of land reserved for open space.

Bill Bracey, vice chairman of the town's Greenways Commission, said protecting the land will not hurt development but instead will have a positive result.

"I don't think there will be an

effect on development but rather on the quality of life for people," Bracey said.

"The land is in an area that has a few interesting aspects. It's in a poorer neighborhood, which is usually underserved in parks."

The town has an overall program to try to get space in as many neighborhoods as possible, officials said.

Contiguous with open space the town already owned, the new land in the Northside neighborhood will allow important greenspace connections, Bracey said.

"Nine acres of land in the middle of an older town doesn't come around that often," he said.

"Its location near Bolin Creek will help preserve water quality."

Bill Webster, assistant director of parks and recreation, said he hopes someday a purchase will be made to connect the different chunks of open

space the town owns in the south, which are separated by some land under private ownership.

But that dream will have to wait until the project receives more funding, he said.

Of the \$2 million in open space bond funds approved by voters in November 2003, only \$100,000 remains.

"The only drawback to this purchase is that there is now less money for other land purchases," Webster said.

"In a real estate market like Chapel Hill's, the amount that we have left will buy little. But this property was a good price."

In the future, prices of houses near the open space land will increase.

"Frequently, they advertise that houses are located near open space," Bracey said.

"It wouldn't surprise me if it would affect the prices of these houses. I'd rather live next to

woods than an apartment building, and I'd pay a little more of a premium for it."

Webster said that he hasn't received negative feedback from neighbors and that he stresses striking a balance between housing and open land.

"Open space is a neighborhood amenity," he said. "It's a recreational, visual and environmental amenity."

Contact the City Editor
at citydesk@unc.edu.

Students combat underage soldiers

BY CAROLYN GRAY
STAFF WRITER

As a 14-year-old, he was forced to murder other Ugandan children and to fight for a cause he did not understand.

After being abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, this child, like many of his peers, was forced to leave behind everything he knew.

That situation is all too common for Ugandan children, says junior Jennifer Monroe, a member of the Student Movement to End Child Soldiering (SMECS).

After Monroe heard about the 14-year-old, she joined the group to help children like him.

The organization's goal is to empower former child soldiers and raise awareness within the University community.

SMECS, a subgroup of Campus Y, will host "The Untold Story: 19 Year War of Abduction and Child Soldiering in Uganda" today at 6 p.m. in the Cobb Theater of the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black History and Culture.

Arthur Serota, executive director of the United Movement to End Child Soldiering, which is based in Washington D.C., and Kahlil Almustafa, an acclaimed poet from Harlem, will speak with students.

"When you think about Africa, you think about AIDS, but there are other things that people ignore," says sophomore Alexis Cooke, a member of SMECS.

Sophomore Jonathan Pourzal says that Uganda's civil war has had dire effects on its citizens and that the international aid effort has created a dependency situation.

"They have lost their livelihoods," says Pourzal, who founded SMECS last year.

The group is working with Friends of Orphans, a Ugandan organization run by former child soldiers that is committed to helping their people of the Acholi tribe.

SMECS aims to generate funding for such organizations, where money earned will go directly to specific projects, including the establishment of a poultry farm.

"We need as much widespread support as possible," Pourzal says. "It's a ripple effect: Once you help people, they will do the same thing."

Ninety percent of the Lord's Resistance Army is made up of children ages eight to 14. The average of a Ugandan child soldier is 12.

"They are forced to kill their own family, they are forced to rape, murder each other and bury people alive," Monroe says.

To date, 30,000 children have been abducted, she says.

"People don't understand that when children are killed and decimated it does not bode well for the future of the country."

Often, child soldiers only remember their lives in the Army.

"They think that anger and aggression is normal," she says. "They go back to the Army because it is all they know."

The organization plans to create a faculty steering committee that will get the word out and increase faculty involvement.

It also aims to bring in students from the medical and business schools.

"Everyone is capable of helping, even if it is just spreading the word," says sophomore Ayana Chandler, a member of SMECS.

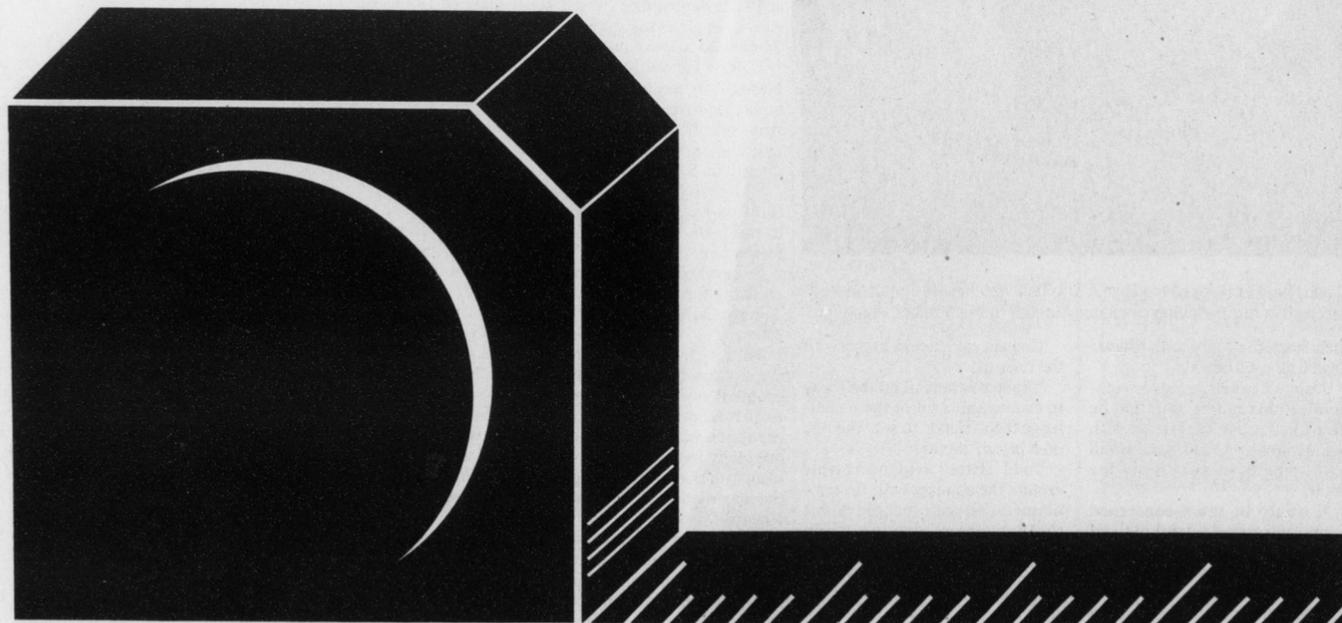
Meanwhile, after stepping on a land mine in an effort to escape the Army, the 14-year-old boy shattered a leg, found a hospital and created a makeshift prosthesis.

Now 18 years old — although he isn't completely sure of his age — the boy has a wife and child and works as a fisherman.

Pourzal and Monroe have split the cost — about \$50 — of buying him a prosthetic limb.

"I will be seeing him next summer," Monroe says. "I hope he has his leg by now."

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