

The Capital Top Stories

County preserves 400 acres in south county

Kinder family sells land in West River

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

County Executive Janet Owens signed a \$2.8 million deal yesterday to buy a 400-acre farm in West River, bringing the number of preserved acres in the county to 12,000.

The unusual preservation deal with the Kinder family took about 18 months to hammer out and should be closed by the end of the year. The Kinder family sold the popular Kinder Farm Park in Millersville to the county some 30 years ago.

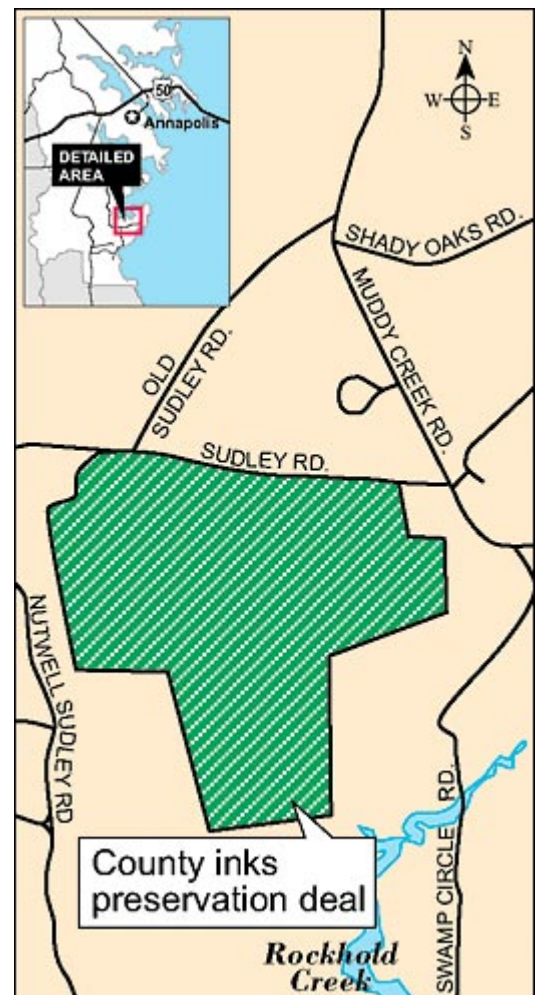
"This is a pristine property that is permanently protected from development," Ms. Owens said. "But even more, this will be a place for the public and the farming community to observe and perpetuate farming practices that are part of ... this county's heritage."

She thanked the family and Mary Kinder, who owns the property, for passing on their farm legacy to county citizens. Ms. Owens said Mrs. Kinder wanted the farm to remain a working cattle farm and to be a place for the public to enjoy.

"I am pleased that we can fulfill her wishes," she said. "I think there is only one parcel this large left in the county. It could have been easy to do something else with it."

The deal is unusual in that the county is purchasing the land outright, as opposed to buying development rights like most other preservation deals. It also is different because the land will be leased to the Soil Conservation District, which will manage the project.

While the citizens of Anne Arundel County will own the property, the county Soil Conservation District will manage the land under a 10-year lease



Capital graphic

agreement.

As part of the \$1-per-year lease, the district will maintain the small cattle operation on the property, set up best agricultural practices demonstration projects, lease part of the land for crops, and open the farm to the public. Any money generated will be put back into the farm.

Mrs. Kinder, 84, and in failing health, will live in her home on the property for the remainder of her days and the farm manager also will stay on the property to maintain the cattle operation.

Bill Miller, a family representative, said family members were pleased to have the deal done.

"We knew we would find a way through to (a deal)," he said. "We are thrilled we are finally there."

He said the family wanted to preserve the land in part because, "you see all the tremendous growth in South County, we need to keep some open space."

The 288 acres the Kinder family sold to the county 30 years ago for Kinder Park Farm has been developed into a park with a variety of natural and recreational activities including hiking, biking, bird watching, fishing and picnicking.

Livestock at the farm is owned and maintained by the local 4-H program.

More than half of the 12,000 acres set aside in the county have been preserved since Ms. Owens took office in 1998. The county preservation program had previously saved about 5,600 acres in 17 years.

A bill approving the Soil Conservation lease was introduced to the County Council last night. It includes two optional 10-year renewals.

"I think this is the only deal like this in the state," Ms. Owens said.

Calvert County is taking a look at the arrangement as a model for possible preservation efforts there.

Soil Conservation District Manager Jeff Opel said a number of things are likely to be included in the management plan that should be near completion by the time the land deal is settled.

"We can demonstrate best practices there like rotational grazing, mixing warm season pasture grasses, and (stream) buffer restoration," he said.

The farm has been known as Rockhold Farm because two springs on the property form the headwaters of that waterway.

"We want to demonstrate how the farm operation and protecting the creek ... can work simultaneously, the two objectives can complement each other," he said.

Ms. Owens said she hopes it is not the last land preservation deal she will sign before

leaving office.

"Hold on to this, I am not done yet," she said, passing a ceremonial pen to county attorney Pat Logan, who helped negotiate the deal.

Recent federal legislation boosting tax advantages for those who donate land for preservation might help convince some landowners to follow suit.

"The county is interested in anything we use as a marketing tool to help put land into preservation," County Land Use and Environment Administrator Betty Dixon.

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