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Blount left 168 shoreline acres on Prudence I. in good hands

Date November 22, 2006

PRUDENCE ISLAND -- Just days before he died, Warren shipbuilder Luther Blount sealed a deal to sell the development rights to 168 acres of his Neck Farm Road land to the Prudence Island Conservancy.

Now the all-volunteer Conservancy has taken up the challenge to raise the \$175,000 it will need to protect the prime shoreline from development.

Board Chairman Bob Marshall said the land, which includes waterfront on both sides of the narrow neck leading to the island's north end is "spectacular, with views in every direction."

Although its full value was assessed at \$1.1 million and the development rights valued at over \$700,000, Mr. Blount offered it to the Conservancy for \$175,000 -- a fraction of that amount.

"Within 10 days of hearing about the opportunity, Islanders stepped forward and pledged the first \$15,000 to make the down payment," Mr. Marshall said. "While this is very encouraging, \$160,000 has to be raised to pay off the promissory note with the first payment of \$50,000 coming due in March of 2007."

The property runs from the fork in the road leading to the north end up toward Potter's Cove and includes Jenny's Creek, the tidal creek that bisects the island at its narrowest point. It was there that Mr. Blount launched his oyster restoration efforts years ago. He has set up a foundation to provide continued support for that oyster work, enlisting the help of Roger Williams University and its marine biology students, for 25 years.

Mr. Blount bought most of the land in 1963 and added another 27 acres in 1976-77. Through the years he kept the land in its natural state, using it for hunting and his shellfish work. His family is retaining a seven-acre portion of Mr. Blount's island holdings.

According to the Portsmouth planning office, the land might have held up to 75 houses had it been sold for development.

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Terms of the conservation easement now provide for the land to be kept in a natural state with no buildings of any kind and no subdivisions.

In addition to the considerable amount of dry buildable land, a third of the parcel is made up of salt marshes, small pools, cobble beach and coastal shrub land.

The acreage falls within the Rhode Island Natural Greenways Corridor and has been identified by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management as a scenic landscape and view. It also provides continued public access to a long stretch of sandy beach -- one of the upper bay's smoothest -- and to trails in the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Several important bird species are present including the great blue heron, black crown night heron, the saw-whet owl, and osprey. Mammals found on the property include deer, fox, mink, rabbits and coyote. Yellow thistle and prickly pear cactus are two rare plants found on the parcel.

By Bruce Burdett

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