

The Post-Journal

FEBRUARY 4, 2003

TUESDAY

VOL. 176 No. 221

Scouts Keep Camp Merz Land

By MICHAEL ZABRODSKY

The Allegheny Highlands Boy Scout Council has scrapped plans to sell a tract of land at Camp Merz.

"The board has voted to cancel the listing for the remaining lakefront parcel that had been offered for sale (approximately 500 feet) and will not be selling it," said Mark S. Williams, council president. "We believe this decision is in everyone's best interest."

Williams said he is happy with the decision and said it is the correct one. "It was a long journey to get to that position, but it was something we needed to do. Our strategic plan for the council required that we look at that," he said.

He said the much-publicized controversy over the proposed sale may have

made the council rethink its plan. "You have to listen to your constituents. I said a long time ago, we made a mistake in not communicating to our members," he said.

The council agreed, however, to sell a small portion, of lakefront land.

"After much discussion the executive board voted to accept an offer from a neighbor to sell him 17 1/2 feet of lakefront land adjacent to his," Williams said. "The proceeds realized from this sale will go in our council endowment fund."

The camp, encompassing about 366 acres, located on Route 394, just outside Mayville, has been in operation since 1935, two years after the property was donated as a gift for Boy Scouts by the

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president*

Allegheny Highlands Boy Scout Council

late Frank Merz, a Jamestown Banker.

Last year, the council had proposed selling about 80 acres of wooded area near the back of the camp and about

500 feet of lake-front property.

"We also decided to reject offers that had been made on the back side of the camp in response to our listing approximately 80 acres of land there for sale," Williams said.

He added a decision was made to "focus" on plans for timber management of the Camp Merz property, which should result in some much-needed revenue to the council endowment.

"I think it's a better deal," said Martin Young, former scoutmaster in Westfield. He said in the past, the council was secretive and now is a little more open.

Williams said the board voted to explore the possibility of selling building lots along the back side of Camp Merz on Morris Road as a way to continue to

build the council's endowment fund. The exact acreage is unknown, he said, but it is less than the 80 acres that was listed earlier.

"This may or may not be feasible and we are only studying this possibility," Williams said. "This area is not being utilized now and does not appear to interfere with the operation of Camp Merz now or in the future."

John Jablonski III, Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy executive director, is also comfortable with the recent announcement. Last year, the conservancy and council had discussed ways to preserve land around the camp, especially the waterfront, and maybe to provide another option.

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"Our interest was in preserving it and making sure it was available for the use of Scouts and the public," Jablonski said. "I am pleased to hear that they are not going to sell it."

Williams said board will start getting ready for a capital and endowment drive to bring council properties and endowment up to the level necessary to ensure the continuity of camping and scouting programs. He said a needs assessment and feasibility study will have to be completed before a capital campaign.

A funding goal has not been established yet. "We need to do the work in the coming year for a capital campaign," he said.