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Palm Terrace to stay in open space

by Marsha Trent
Sonoma West Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — The grass-roots campaign to save Palm Terrace from development was proclaimed a success last week.

With the signing of escrow papers by Laguna Uplands Project leaders, the eight acres along the western edge of the Laguna de Santa Rosa will remain as open space forever.

The controversial property had been slated for an 18-unit housing project until local organizers launched an ambitious campaign to buy the property and spare it from development.

To Juliana Doms, one of the organizers of the effort to raise \$1.5 million to purchase the land located behind Palm Drive Hospital and south of Walker

Avenue, the close of escrow on Friday morning was more than a land deal.

"It was symbolic of building bridges, opening lines of communication ..." and an affirmation that "if you have a solid vision based on good principles and will work with others ... you can achieve," what seemed to some "a childish dream," Doms said.

"You have to be in the right place, at the right time and have the vision to act," she added.

Doms and political opposite Bill Haigwood, a Sebastopol realtor and Sonoma West Times & News columnist, joined forces to raise the money for the land about seven months ago, after the City Council settled a lawsuit with the property owners

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allowing residential development of the land.

Doms had been considering a lawsuit to halt development on the parcel, which is inside the city limits, but determined instead to rally community members who wanted to preserve the land to buy the property from the heirs of Dino Ghilotti and local resident George Young.

Joan Vilms, a principal of Land Wrights, the land trust organization chosen by the Laguna Uplands Project committee to hold the property, said she envisions the project now evolving into a joint stewardship with the project leaders and Native Americans jointly managing the open space.

Vilms said, there is now even more opportunity for diverse community interests (including

Native Americans who claim the land is part of their cultural heritage) to come together.

"The land is permanently protected and the subdivision is closed forever," Vilms said, so community members now have the time they need to evolve a plan and organization for management of the parcel.

Fundraising, that included everything from dances and bake sales to coin jars on counters in various West County businesses, raised nearly \$120,000, Vilms said.

The Sonoma County Open Space District paid \$900,000 for a conservation easement, which was a departure from its usual method of helping communities protect land that is within city limits.

Hallie Swan, land acquisitions specialist at the Open Space District, said normally it is up to the city government to make provisions for protection of open space within the city lim-