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Laguna . . .

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porter, made an unlikely pairing with Haigwood. But their mutual goal to preserve the Laguna paid off.

"I'm extremely excited," Doms said. "It has solidified my belief that if you stick with something long enough, it turns out right." And stick with it, they did.

Even after the county Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District paid \$900,000 for the development rights in 1996, supporters still had to raise more than \$330,000,

due in a series of payments, to complete purchase the property. That campaign, which included many small donations, change jars at local stores and bake sales, fell short.

The Laguna Uplands Committee failed to make one of the payments, despite raising nearly \$100,000, and the land went back to the Ghilotti family.

While most of the supporters gave up the effort, Haigwood and Doms did not relent.

"We felt we had an obligation," said Doms. "We didn't like the fact that we defaulted."

Haigwood continued to contact the Ghilottis and his persistence eventually paid off.

"Bill stepped forward and continued to talk to us after we had to take the property back," said Jim Ghilotti, the family representative involved in the negotiations. "The only group that has showed any continuous interest in trying to pursue discussions was the Laguna Foundation . . . our decision was based, probably 99 percent of our decision, on the personal efforts of Bill Haigwood. He kept coming back with proposals. His efforts paid off."

Ghilotti said the decision to donate the land was influenced by the fact that the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation was an established conservation organi-

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zation. The family did have other requests to donate the land.

"Based on the realities of the tax laws and charitable donations laws, and since they (the Laguna Foundation) showed the most interest, if they were going to donate it to anybody, it was the foundation," said Ghilotti. "It made a lot of sense from a business and practical point of view."

Ghilotti, the nephew of property owners Diane Ongaro, Richard Ghilotti and Linda Ghilotti, said "The real question was who was worthy of the donation. And due to the efforts of Bill, it was the foundation."

Haigwood said the gift should boost efforts for restoration and preservation of the Laguna, including the city of Sebastopol's Laguna Park.

"We are hopeful that this gift from the Ghilotti family will stimulate a renewed interest and cooperation among government entities, environmental and business groups, and the community, to aggressively pursue development of a master plan for the restoration and preservation of the Laguna."

The land will remain closed to the public until natural trails and other low-intensity uses are developed.

Haigwood added that "we

see it as an integral part of the whole Laguna Park plan, both the city and county, primarily as a wetland and nature preserve."

Doms said "The fact that Bill and I even started on this together is remarkable, but also that we were able to do it. This somehow turned out to be a great Christmas present."

Now, she added, "We get to complete the second phase," which will include public access and restoration of the land.

The Sebastopol City Council is due to reconsider a funding request for implementation of its Laguna Park Master Plan in February.