

PRESERVING THE NATURAL AND SCENIC CHARACTER OF OUR ISLAND

# LAND TRUST

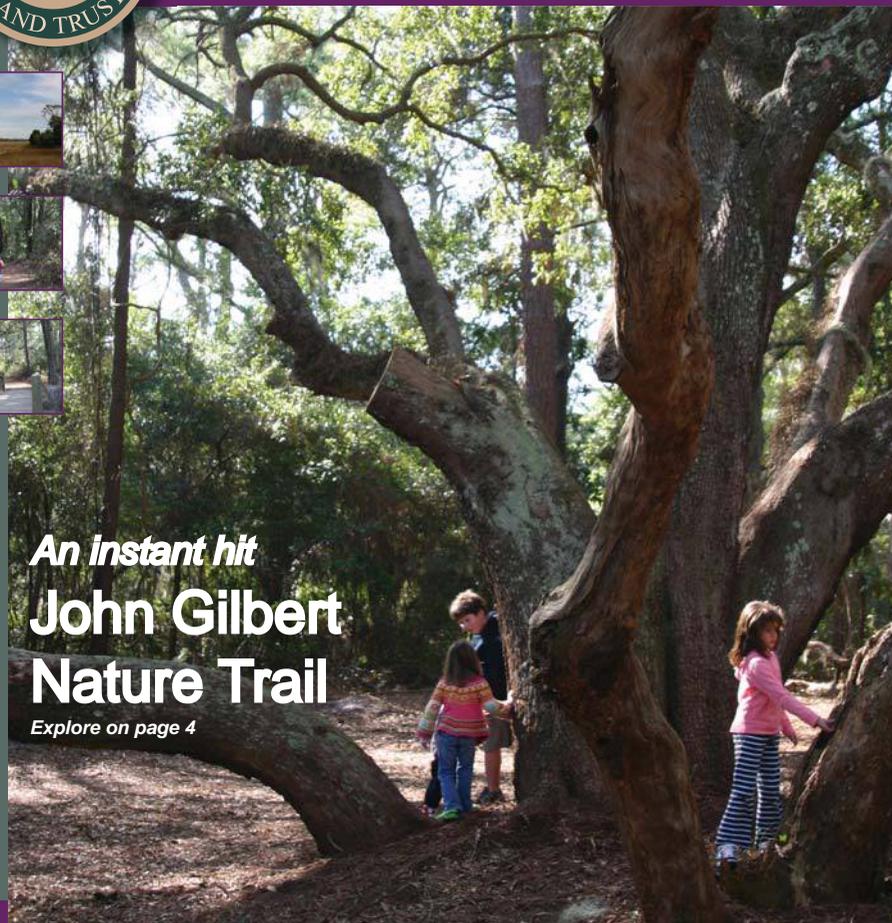
## NEWS

SPRING 2007



*An instant hit*  
**John Gilbert  
Nature Trail**

*Explore on page 4*



## Message from the Chairman and President



Board Chairman Duane Harris and President Russ Marane at the new John Gilbert Nature Trail

Last year was a year of change and much progress for the St. Simons Land Trust, as you'll note from many of the stories in this newsletter. One of our major accomplishments, the retirement of all of our debt incurred by land acquisitions, is due to the generosity of our membership and business partners. This has enabled your Land Trust to begin 2007 financially ready to undertake new initiatives.

We have learned, over the last eight years as your Land Trust, that the people who live on St. Simons and Sea islands care passionately about the beauty and ecological integrity of their community and want to preserve those scenic and natural qualities that drew them here in the first place. Today, with the increased popularity of the Georgia coast, we all feel a sense of urgency to protect the areas that define our hometown. In order to

do so, we must be financially able to seize the moment when conservation opportunities present themselves. As we move forward this year, your Land Trust board and staff will work diligently to develop sources of funding and other tools to do just that, while a window of opportunity is still available.

As our Greenprint Plan recommends, we continue to look for additional land in the historic Harrington community adjacent to Harrington Schoolhouse Preserve to better connect this site to the rest of the community. Such an acquisition would offer further protection for feeding aquatic bird species, including the wood stork, on the ponds located there. Also a top priority for your Land Trust is ensuring the protection of the tree canopy along Frederica and Demere roads. We continue to seek out key parcels along this historic route that will no doubt be expensive and will require the attention of our entire community if we wish to protect them.

There are many other areas throughout the island where we are working daily to help landowners achieve their conservation objectives. With your continued support we can and will succeed.

*Duane Harris  
Russ Marane*

## DOROTHY GILBERT AWARD GOES TO THE BRUNSWICK NEWS



Board Chairman Duane Harris (right) presented the Dorothy Gilbert Award to Jennifer and Buff Leavy of The Brunswick News. The award is given to an individual or business that has contributed significantly to the mission of the St. Simons Land Trust.

*"The Leavys and The Brunswick News have been most generous in their support of the Land Trust," Harris said. "They are always there when we need them – for example, regularly providing printing support for our newsletter."*

*The award was named for Dorothy Gilbert, who in the early days of the Land Trust donated the property on Frederica Road that has recently been opened up as the John Gilbert Nature Trail.*

## Dana Pope joins Land Trust



The St. Simons Land Trust has a new director of development and membership.

Dana Pope joined the Land Trust in late fall after serving as director of advancement at Frederica Academy. A resident of St. Simons since 1996, she is a proponent of conservation and looks forward to taking part in the challenges of the Land Trust and the impact its growing membership will have on the future of the island.

## Crunch time for St. Simons?

### Land Trust Alliance president sees conservation urgency

Rand Wentworth, national president of the Land Trust Alliance, brought good news and bad news to the recent St. Simons Land Trust forum at the Casino.

The good news: Some 37 million acres (about the size of Georgia) have been protected by land trusts and conservancies across the United States, and the pace has accelerated in the past five

years. About 2.2 million acres are now being saved every year.

The bad news: "We're in a race against time." We may have 20 years to protect the best of what God gave us on this continent. St. Simons Island probably has less time.

What St. Simons faces is related to what the U.S. landscape faces, Wentworth said. The U.S. population is expected to grow to 450 million in 40 years. The footprint of sprawl grows at seven times the population growth, he said, so in the next 45 years, pavement and developed land is expected to triple.

Wentworth called local land trusts "the great hope for land conservation." The federal government is out of money, he said, but across the country

land trusts are taking charge of their local communities. In five years, affiliates of the Land Trust Alliance have doubled the number of protected acres. "Land trusts work because they are voluntary local relationships with local landowners, not the government."

Wentworth added that "in a tough real estate market like St. Simons, it's going to be hard to get land. You have to have a war chest so you can be a player. With money in the bank, you can go to foundations and governments for matching dollars."

Before becoming president of the Washington-based Land Trust Alliance, Wentworth was director of the Trust for Public Land in Atlanta.



"WE MAY HAVE 20 YEARS TO PROTECT THE BEST OF WHAT GOD GAVE US ON THIS CONTINENT. ST. SIMONS ISLAND PROBABLY HAS LESS TIME."

## Effort under way to make federal conservation tax incentive permanent

On Jan. 31, Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) introduced a bill that would make the newly expanded tax incentive for conservation easement donations permanent. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) co-sponsored the bill. The following day, the Bush administration announced that the incentive had been included in its proposed 2008 budget.

According to the Land Trust Alliance website: "The bill permanently extends the tax incentive passed by Congress in August 2006. Now scheduled to expire at the end of this year, this incentive:

- Raises the deduction landowners can take for donating conservation easements from 30 percent of their income in any year to 50 percent
- Extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from five to 15 years.

Sen. Baucus is the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Sen. Grassley is the ranking member. We couldn't

have started out better than having the two leaders of the committee on our side. Please take the time to thank them!

In the coming weeks, we will ask for your help getting your senators to join as a cosponsor of S. 469.

The incentives allow landowners with moderate incomes to

benefit from protecting important natural resources on their land by getting the same deductions that donors with

higher incomes already realize for the same donations.

Voluntary conservation agreements, also known as conservation easements, are an important tool for land conservation. They provide a way for landowners to protect resources important to the public by giving up future development rights, while retaining ownership and management of their land.

The St. Simons Land Trust, through its membership in the Land Trust Alliance, is supporting the effort to make the incentives permanent.



# John Gilbert Nature Trail: An instant hit

For seven years, the St. Simons Land Trust's first and largest protected property sat hidden away on Frederica Road



across from the Devonwood subdivision. Who knew that behind that unremarkable frontage, the Frederica Marsh preserve contained 36 acres of marsh plus four acres of upland filled with oaks, pines, and other native flora?

Then late last year, the Land Trust unveiled the property, making it accessible to everyone via a 1.5-mile trail through the woods and out to the marsh. On Dec. 9, following a day of hard work building a boardwalk across the section leading to the marsh, some 25 volunteers and staff celebrated the official opening of the John Gilbert Nature Trail.

"This is the first time we've asked for volunteers to spend a day working on a nature preserve," said Russ Marane, Land Trust president. "Everyone had such a good time, and the project was completed so successfully, I think we'll do it again."

The trail was an instant hit with locals and is now being discovered by visitors cycling along the Frederica Road hiking/biking trail. Among the refinements since opening day have been benches, a bike rack and a small parking area set aside behind the trees near the road.

The nature trail includes a

soft surface walking trail, two bridges, the boardwalk, and an observation deck with a view of the marsh. The observation deck and boardwalk include built-in benches. A kiosk-style trailhead sign will soon have a trail map, as well as information about the Land Trust. Interpretive signs are also planned for sites along the trail. The Land Trust has invested some \$50,000 in making the trail accessible and functional.

Near the entrance to the trail stands a majestic live oak tree. Dorothy Gilbert, former owner of the preserve, calls it "John's Oak" in memory of her late husband. The preserve provides habitat for small mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles.

Cumberland Contractors and Elite Landscaping donated a portion of their services to build and landscape the nature trail.



## NO DONOR TOO YOUNG. NO DONATION TOO SMALL.

Isaac Daley used to love the old gas station at the corner of Frederica and Demere roads. "When I was four, I always wanted to go there so I could see the car wash next door," he says. But when the station closed, he decided, "That thing is ugly, and it's just rotting there." So when he rode by one day and noticed the sign announcing that the St. Simons Land Trust planned to tear down the station and turn the

corner into a greenspace, he knew what he had to do.

Isaac went home and retrieved \$10 from his Christmas money and promptly sent it in to the Land Trust fund-raising drive. He was nine years old at the time.

Today at age 11, Isaac is still a sup-



porter of the Land Trust and its youngest member. Why does he continue to pay dues out of his birthday and Christmas money? "I just noticed that St. Simons is getting too many houses," he says. "The few places that are left are going to be built on or be destroyed, and I didn't want that to happen. So, I just

wanted to keep it the way it is as long as possible."

The Frederica Academy fifth grader has a wide variety of interests from Boy Scouts to soccer, basketball, rockets, history, and geography (he placed second in his school's geography bee). He has a brother, two sisters and, oh yes, two cats and a jardiens parrot.



## NO GREENSPACE TOO SMALL

On a little island like St. Simons, sometimes preserving greenspace means thinking small. That's small as in "pocket park."

The Land Trust's latest acquisition is a pocket park on Demere Road, just north of Arnold Road. The park has been landscaped and will soon sport a bench to provide a

pleasant place for a brief respite by walkers and cyclists. The land was donated to the Land Trust by Mike and Dana Hodges, and Jeff Anderson, who used a bit of creativity in developing their small condominium complex on the adjacent property.

"What they chose to do was to locate the condo building

on the back portion of the property so they could save the trees and greenspace closer to the road," says Michelle Pugliese, Land Trust director of land protection.

Pugliese says the donors are the first on St. Simons to

Mike Hodges



take advantage of the dollar-for-dollar tax credit for land conservation passed last year by the Georgia General Assembly.

The park's landscaping, which includes the planting of two live oak trees, was donated to the Land Trust by Peach State Landscape and Design Inc.

## GEM OF THE HISTORIC SCHOOLHOUSE: HARRINGTON SCHOOLHOUSE PRESERVE

In the midst of the Land Trust's largest upland preserve, on South Harrington Road, sits an important piece of the island's fast-disappearing African American heritage — the last remaining African American schoolhouse.

The St. Simons African American Heritage Coalition, headed by Ron Upshaw, is working to restore the



dilapidated 1925 schoolhouse and reopen its doors as a cultural heritage center and museum. A Land Trust member, Upshaw and his wife, Barbara, moved here from New Jersey in 2003. The Land Trust News spoke with him about the coalition's plans for the schoolhouse.

**Q** How did you hear about the Harrington Schoolhouse?

**A** It's been simmering in the background for the coalition for awhile. But through the efforts of the Land Trust, who acquired the property with the county, it was brought to the front burner. Then we could see the possibility of getting involved and preserving it as an African American artifact. We went to the Watson Brown Foundation for preliminary money to conduct a study to

see if the building could be reconstructed to resemble and reflect what it once was.

**Q** What does the schoolhouse look like now?

**A** It started in the 1920s as a one-room schoolhouse, devoted to the education of African American children. At that time, they had to build their own schoolhouse with private donations because of segregation. The builder was a carpenter who built it using state-of-the-art techniques. Now it's a building that's falling down in places. Some parts of the roof have caved in. There's some damage to walls and windows, and a lot of graffiti. The grounds are totally unkempt and overgrown.

**Q** What are you doing to restore the schoolhouse?

**A** We started developing a sustainability plan several months ago — focusing first on architectural problems and on finding an architect. We incorporated into the plan how we can operate in the future as a viable community center. We did this with an \$18,000 grant from the Watson Brown Foundation and are targeting May for presenting the whole package to them.

Now we have to accumulate funds to do the actual reconstruction and refurbishing. The architect has estimated the cost at \$160,000.

**Q** You mentioned using the building as a community center.

**A** That ties in with the sustainability part of it. We'd

have to generate funds to maintain this structure for posterity, to make it a viable part of the community.

One thing we're talking about is putting artifacts there that would reflect African American history and culture on the island. A Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor is being developed from South Carolina to Florida, including all the barrier islands that were used by the planters to raise cotton,

rice, and indigo with slave labor. We hope St. Simons will be a logical stopping point. Conceivably you could add another layer of tourists that wouldn't have come here.

**Q** What's the renovation timeframe?

**A** Construction will take a year, so we're looking at the end of 2008. That's when the Gullah/Geechee Corridor is supposed to be operational.

### HARRINGTON'S HIDDEN TREASURE



Tucked away in the Harrington neighborhood is a beautiful 12-acre preserve acquired by the Land Trust in 2006. Now called the Harrington Schoolhouse Preserve, the property contains ecologically sensitive wetlands, as well as two ponds that provide habitat for federally endangered wood storks and other native wildlife.

The Land Trust envisions a nature trail on 1.5 acres of the site, with interpretive signs about native plants, as well as the cultural history of the Harrington Schoolhouse and the surrounding historic neighborhood.

The property is located in the Mid-Island History Corridor, an area identified as a priority in the Land Trust's 2006 Greenprint Plan. As called for in the 10-year plan, the Land Trust hopes to expand the preserve by gradually acquiring adjacent properties.

### Neptune-Gascoigne trail update

Glynn County and the Land Trust have accepted proposals from six engineering firms hoping to oversee construction of a trail planned for Neptune Park to Gascoigne Bluff Park. A recommendation will soon go to the county administrator, then to the county finance committee. If all goes well, a firm will be selected by the end of April and the completed trail design will be ready to bid in September.

The 2.6-mile concrete trail will take walkers and bikers from Neptune Park in the Village,



out to Kings Way, across the marsh on a 100-foot boardwalk to an overlook along the Frederica River, and ultimately under the causeway bridge and into Gascoigne Bluff Park.

The trail is Phase 1 of a master trail plan designed for the Land Trust in 2005. It's being funded by a federal grant obtained by the county through the Georgia Department of Transportation and also by the county itself. In June, the Land Trust plans to submit an application for funding for the second phase of the 16-mile master trail.

### Debt-free!

A year-end special appeal to members of the St. Simons Land Trust netted a healthy \$55,030 — enough to retire all debt incurred from previous land purchases and to fund a portion of the materials used to build the John Gilbert Nature Trail. These gifts were not memberships, but donations made by current members above and beyond their membership dues, said Dana Pope, director of development and membership. We can't thank these donors enough for their generosity.

Pope said the special giving also enabled the Land Trust to go into the new year with the resources to carry out our mission.

### Thank you!

The St. Simons Land Trust would like to recognize a special group of oyster roasters who every year provide steaming oysters to our guests at the annual Oyster Roast held in November. Thanks so much to:

- Charlie Williams of Crabdaddy's
- Gordy Merrill of The Crab Trap
- Denise and Don Gentile, Alice and Chris Paolini of Bennie's Red Barn

The list of new Live Oak Society members in the last newsletter should have included: Susan and Don Myers.

THE MISSION OF THE ST. SIMONS LAND TRUST IS TO PRESERVE THE ISLAND'S NATURAL AND SCENIC CHARACTER AND TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF OUR ISLAND COMMUNITY FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

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### You and the St. Simons Land Trust

When you join the St. Simons Land Trust, you become part of the premier organization on St. Simons Island. Your membership enables us to pursue our vision of protecting the natural and scenic character of our island community and its quality of life. As a member, you receive a Land Trust decal, the newsletter, invitations to special events, and the opportunity to volunteer for special projects. Our members play a vital role in supporting our daily operations as well as our outreach and awareness programs. Please join us in protecting the things we all love about St. Simons Island. The Land Trust is a non-profit organization, and all gifts are tax-deductible.

# JOIN NOW!

**Please sign me up at the membership level checked below:**

- |                                                       |                                            |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Membership</b>                                     | <b>Live Oak Society</b>                    |                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 - 99 Sand Dollar        | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 - 4,999   | Live Oak Supporter  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 - 249 Starfish         | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 - 9,999   | Live Oak Sponsor    |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 - 999 Great Blue Heron | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000+         | Live Oak Benefactor |

Ms.  Mr.  Mrs.  Mr. and Mrs.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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 John Jones and Mary Smith, Mrs. Ralph Brown, Mr. and Mrs. John Jones.*

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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I would like to volunteer my time:  Administrative support / mailings  
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Please send me information on including the Land Trust in my estate planning. (All gifts are tax-deductible.)