

State completes deal for Porter-Sesnon land

By JONDI GUMZ
Sentinel assistant city editor

APTOS — For the Friends of Porter-Sesnon, the state acquisition of the oceanfront property off Highway 1 is a belated but welcome Christmas present.

"It's fantastic. We're very excited it's going to be a state park," said Friends spokeswoman Vickie Powell-Murray on Thursday, one day after the state closed escrow on the 72-acre site once envisioned as the location for a hotel, and performing arts center.

"I've been working 14 years on this (to keep the land from being developed)."

Playing the part of Santa in this holiday scene is state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, who put together a funding package to buy the property.

The cost: \$3.45 million.

In July, Mello secured \$2 million from the state budget for the purchase. Then the Legislature approved a bill, written by Mello, to provide an addition-

al \$1 million. The remainder was raised by the state Parks and Recreation Department.

Rosalie Kraft, a Pine Tree Lane resident who devoted almost 14 years to the Friends of Porter-Sesnon, said Powell-Murray also deserved credit for fighting to preserve the property.

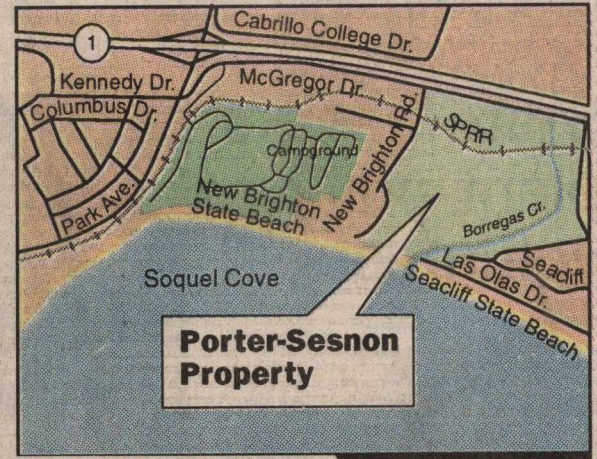
"We are forever indebted to her for not giving up," said Kraft, who called the site overlooking the ocean "a beautiful place" that should be open to everyone, not just the wealthy.

Not everyone waxes enthusiastic about the newest park in Santa Cruz County.

"It's absolutely foolhardy," boomed Lee Phelps of Aptos, who heads ACTIV, the statewide taxpayer advocacy group.

"I find it a bit dismaying that the state can find money to acquire that expensive a piece of property and take it off the tax rolls when state is incurring a

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\$5 billion to \$8 billion deficit for the third year in a row and the county insists it has no money for fundamental services like keeping offices open over the holiday or opening the new jail or putting enough deputies enough on the street," he said.

"It makes me wonder where the county or city will find money to do anything with property, let alone maintain it, or develop an adequate park," he added.

So far, politics and money have determined the fate of the open meadows and bluffs tucked in between New Brighton State Beach and Seacliff State Beach.

Developer Ryland Kelley of Palo Alto purchased a 99-year lease to the site in 1979, then embarked on an ambitious proposal dubbed Wingspread Beach: condominiums, a conference center and a performing arts complex. A prolonged battle ensued, with county supervisors conditionally approving the project in 1988, but leaving the final say up to voters.

They said no.

The future of the property has yet to be determined.

"It should be a park," said Joan Rost, who is a member of the Aptos Neighbors Association.

Her husband, Clayton Rost, pointed out that such a use would demand less of resources such as water that are in short supply.

"It's the best use to preserve the environment and our way of life in Santa Cruz," he said.

Even before the state closed escrow, though, officials with local sports clubs were starting a letter-

writing campaign, seeking support to develop ballfields for soccer and football on part of the property.

Powell-Murray contends any development of that nature "is a long way off" because, first of all "there are a lot of bureaucratic hoops to be jumped through," and second, "it costs a lot of money to do what the sports people are talking about."

Bob Camacho, a Pop Warner football coach for 20 years and league president for the last five, is not optimistic that the new state park will yield any benefits soon for his young players.

"I don't think the state or the county realizes what is needed for these kids," he said.

Camacho had high hopes of getting additional playing fields after the city of Santa Cruz acquired Pogonip, a 600-acre undeveloped area near UC Santa Cruz. Instead, he learned, "the main concern was to save the property (from development)."

He sees Porter-Sesnon as an opportunity to provide positive outlets for youngsters. "There are all these kids out there with no place to go, nothing to amuse themselves," he said.

Meanwhile, the Friends of Porter-Sesnon, having achieved its goal, has no plans to disband, according to Powell-Murray.

"A lot of different things will be open to discussion," she said, "and we feel we should have a say. ... It will be interesting to see how it all unfolds. Tune in for Chapter 2."