

# Gray Whale donates land for school

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SANTA CRUZ — Some 30 acres of meadow where Santa Cruz school officials hope to someday build a school was donated Friday by the owners of the Gray Whale Ranch.

The approximate 30-acre property was given to UC Santa Cruz by Ron and Linda Yanke, whose 2,400-acre Gray Whale Ranch is located on the western border of the university.

Santa Cruz City School district trustees expect, in turn, to lease the property from the university for a middle school within a few years.

That is the university's way of easing the effect of the university and its projected growth on the school population.

"This is not a surprise. We have had very long, protracted negotiations over a decade," said Santa Cruz City Schools trustee Arthur Pearl.

Located west of Empire Grade near the west entrance to the campus, the property is principally a meadow immediately adjacent to the campus boundary.

Although an appraisal has not been done, the land is estimated to be worth \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million, said Michael Houlemard, executive assistant to UCSC Chancellor Robert Stevens.

The property will be added to 45 acres of university land which is identified in long-range plans for

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roughly 200 units of staff, graduate student and family student housing. Combining the 30 and 45 acres sites will allow the school to be better situated environmentally, Houlemard said. "It helps us plan for the visual impact. We can put the school back in the tree line instead of out in the meadow."

The school district will be responsible for the planning, design and construction of the school.

A new middle school would free Mission Hill Junior High to be used as an elementary school, satellite Santa Cruz High School campus or alternative school, said Pearl.

Projections call for a new school by 1994 at the earliest, said Houlemard. Pearl cautioned, however, that the pace might be slowed because of lower-than-expected growth in student enrollment. Nor does the school district rank highly among districts competing for scarce state school construction funds, he said. "We're not bursting out of our skin in terms of enrollment."

Houlemard said Yanke's gift is not in any way connected to a controversial development proposal for the remainder of Gray Whale Ranch. The Yankes have proposed 135 homes, 1,800 acres of public and private open space and 546

acres of logging land on the Gray Whale property. Gray Whale Ranch foreman John Steinbacher said the landowners are in "quiet negotiations" with Santa Cruz County planning officials regarding their proposal and have been asked by county officials to remain mum on the talks.

"There is no relationship between this and anything else," said Houlemard. "It is a gift by Ron Yanke who understood the need of the community and wanted to help. I do not anticipate that there ever will be an access across the university to the areas to be developed," he said.

The donation may be followed by others from the Yankes, said Stephanie Hauk, university spokeswoman. "We expect more in terms of gifts at another time," she said.

Steinbacher said no specific land grants are planned at this time.

Houlemard said a proposal to allow access to Wilder State Park through the donated land has been discussed. Such an easement would link equestrian trails between Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton and Wilder Ranch State Park. "The university, on first blush, is not opposed to that."

Houlemard said he expects a long-term lease will be negotiated

with the school district in the next year. Use of the property as a school site is in lieu of fees to the school district to offset effects of university growth within classrooms.

Within the next three months, the property will be appraised, surveyed, and have lot-line adjustments, Houlemard said. The exact size of the Yankes' donation, comprised of parts of two parcels, will be determined by the lot-line adjustments, said Hauk.

"We intend to move as quickly as possible. We know the school district is anxious to begin its planning process," said Hauk.

Pearl said the university site was the only location identified following an exhaustive search for middle school sites. "We don't have a choice of druthers. There are virtually no places in Santa Cruz that are large enough and currently not occupied that can be used. You take what you can get. This became basically the only site."

Besides ample space — 15 acres is the minimum needed for a middle school — the west side is also where school enrollment has grown, Pearl said.

Both Pearl and Houlemard said traffic generated by the school will rank high on the list of problems to be resolved.