

Western Virginia Land Trust now depends entirely on us

Hard economic times have hit our country to a degree most of us never imagined, and that makes everything related to money more difficult, not least the noble task of fundraising for worthy causes.

At the Western Virginia Land Trust, the approaching Christmas season – when non-profit organizations benefit most from people's generous impulses – is viewed as particularly crucial.

In September, the Land Trust received its final \$40,000 annual gift from the Colcom Foundation in Pittsburgh. Originally \$50,000, the money had arrived faithfully since 1996.

It enabled Rupert Cutler, executive director of Explore Park at the time, to become the Trust's founding executive director in 1997. Now, the \$40,000 amounts to 25 percent of the Trust's \$160,000 annual operating budget.

Nowadays, Roger Holnback, the current executive director, spends about half his time raising funds. Last year, Trust members donated about \$80,000, and the rest of the money came from grants and the like.

The \$40,000 gift – from the foundation of a friend of Cutler's who preferred to remain anonymous – made Holnback's task lighter.

Now, he'll have to fill that significant hole. The Trust's Pennsylvania connection is gone – but not without abundant gratitude from everyone associated with the non-profit.

A land trust is a community-based, private, non-profit organization that encourages "balanced community development" and saving important local landscapes. As the WVLT's Website puts it, such landscapes are "the natural and cultural features that define a community's character and identify."

The Trust encourages voluntary conservation easements to protect open land forever, in exchange for estate and tax advantages, basically.

Why should we care? Because we are surrounded by natural beauty vulnerable to

urban sprawl. Preserving the best of it keeps our community identity – and a significant attraction for outsiders – intact.

It also helps protect our water quality and nourish our souls.

The Trust's success stories include small farms, 6,185 acres in the Carvins Cove Natural Reserve and nearly 250 acres of Read Mountain. These places will not be developed – ever.

The Western Virginia Land Trust covers greater Roanoke and 10 counties. It has some 700 members, or donors, but the figure has remained steady in recent years.

Without their support, the Trust could not exist. Without Rupert Cutler's friendship with Cordelia Scaife May, known to her friends as "Cordy", the Trust probably would not have come so far. Certainly, the task would have been more difficult.

May died in 2005 but her foundation staff kept the money coming to the Trust for a bit longer at her request. The foundation's priority is southwestern Pennsylvania, not Southwest Virginia.

Now, Holnback and David Perry, the Trust's project manager, encourage Southwest Virginians to help replace that gift with donation of all sizes. Ideally, they'll be inspired by May's example.

Cordy May of Ligonier, PA, was an heir to the Mellon fortune and in 2005 was named "the single most generous person in the United States" by the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Cutler says in the Trust's upcoming newsletter. She was "as nice a person as you can imagine, with a rich sense of



Joe Kennedy

humor and an especially kind way with young people."

Last year, her foundations gave \$23 million to worthwhile endeavors, Holnback says.

Clearly, she thought big and thought ahead. That's a good habit

to develop, and the Land Trust is a good place to start.

May's annual contribution may be gone, but as Holnback says in the newsletter, "all over America, hundreds of land trusts ... are supported entirely from the generous support of local donors. Now our land trust will need to be, as well."

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