



Turtleback officially dedicated at ceremony with SJ Preservation Trust, SJ County Land Bank, Turtleback Steering Committee Chair and others

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Editor

Turtleback Mountain was officially dedicated Saturday, July 7, with a small crowd gathered at the entrance to the South Trail to hear remarks by Tim Seifert, San Juan Preservation Trust Executive Director, Lincoln Bormann, County Land Bank Executive Director, Nancy Greene, Land Bank Commissioner, and Mary Riveland, Steering Committee chair for the Turtleback project.

The \$18.5 million Campaign to Save Turtleback Mountain was the most ambitious conservation project and fundraising effort ever undertaken by the San Juan Preservation Trust, and it also represents the largest fundraising effort in the history of San Juan County. San Juan County's Land Bank now manages access to the property, while the Preservation Trust retains a conservation easement that assures the mountain can never be developed and will forever remain open to the public.

The property had been actively pursued by residential and private resort developers before an agreement was reached with conservation interests to acquire the property.

Before unveiling a plaque honoring the community's involvement in purchasing Turtleback Mountain from the Medina Foundation, which put the property up for sale in August of 2005, the officials addressed the crowd.

Seifert said, "We live in a community that stepped up and made this happen, raising \$18.5 million in six months." Seifert acknowledged that the fundraising effort was greatly assisted by the Land Bank's contribution of \$10 million; leaving \$8.5 million to be raised from private individuals. "That should make it feel like this is your mountain. It's going to keep revealing itself for generations."

Mary Riveland thanked "my board," and noted that, previously, the largest fundraiser had been for \$1.3 million for a Waldron Island project. She recalled musing years earlier that, if Turtleback were to come on the market, it would cost around five million dollars.

The Land Bank now will manage the 1,576 acres of Turtleback, "essentially as a wilderness preserve," Riveland said. She invited the public to provide input in the decision-making process, as they have "an equity stake" in the usage of Turtleback.

Riveland acknowledged the work of the San Juan Preservation staff, who worked “at least double the minimum hours” during the effort to acquire Turtleback.

“In the end, it was a community effort, from the Girl Scouts to cartoonists, to Orcas Island high schoolers,” she said, adding that “angels stepped up right when they were most needed,” providing sizable donations.

Lincoln Bormann thanked Tim Seifert, for “figuring out what to do - what a great problem to have.”

Nancy Greene recalled Bormann's hiring process, with the hypothetical question of "What would you do if a big estate came on the market that was threatened by developers?"

With just two weeks under his belt, Bormann faced that problem. “Never in our wildest dreams did we think that the whole area would be in public ownership. I see it as a miracle. What an incredible gift to the people that come after us,” said Greene.

Seifert thanked Bormann and the Land Bank for making Turtleback accessible to the public -right away- and then unveiled the plaque, which is a placeholder for the bronze plaque that has been ordered but is yet to come, saying, “All islanders understand that things don’t always happen exactly as we’d hoped they would.”

Except for Turtleback, where things did happen exactly as the community hoped it would.