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Battle over Battlefield strategy is victorious

By GIDGET FUENTES
Journal staff writer

As the small crowd gathered Saturday on a site of a Civil War field hospital, Annie Snyder's voice choked with emotion as she wiped a tear from her large, blue eyes.

It was as much a tear of joy as it was a sigh of relief, as the reality of what happened slowly sunk in.

Last Thursday night, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill seizing the William Center tract from its developer and putting the land in the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

After 10 months of battling the county government and a stolid developer, the 67-year-old former Marine and her loyal troops stood upon that seized land and savored their latest victory.

Ten months ago, office buildings were eyed for the area on which they stood, part of a large-scale development that would include 560 homes and a 1.2-million-square-foot mall.

Saturday members of the Save the Battlefield Coalition thanked President Reagan and the coalition of local volunteers and national figures who helped carry the battle from rural Gainesville to the White House.

Amid the camaraderie, they vowed to continue their fight to other parks around the country under threat of development.

Journal focus

■ Annie Snyder now fights for health/A5

and chairman of the Board of County Supervisors, lamenting the loss of tax revenues if the William Center were not built, asked, "At what point do you take a look at public responsibility, in providing funds?"

Supervisor Robert Cole, D-Gainesville, angered mall opponents when he said, "We're no longer going to stand in the shadow of Fairfax County."

With strategy and luck the mall opponents' battle grew from a local squabble over land use to a fight to preserve a piece of Civil War history.

With "20/20" hindsight, mall opponents point to several factors that helped build the momentum to a victorious conclusion.

No one doubts Annie Snyder was the catalyst. "It all goes back to Annie," said Teresh Boasberg, an attorney who represents the coalition.

"The organization at the local level and Annie's leadership brought a very interesting and fascinating tale," Boasberg said. "Annie was able to translate it into a national issue."

"Here is a 67-year-old ex-Marine, diabetic and very appealing," he added. "She has tremendous charisma."

The Catharpin resident is no stranger to such controversy. Since she and husband Pete moved to Pageland Farm in 1950 with their six children, the red-headed Snyder managed to poke her nose in local issues.

Over the years, she has virtually perfected the skills of recruiting volunteers for her cause, since her days as a recruiter in the Marine Corps Women's Reserve Branch.

Snyder takes pride in doing thorough research on an issue and her neat but cluttered office on the second floor of her home displays her knack for detail. She has penned hundreds of letters to editors and groups on dozens of issues through the years.

After 38 years of activism, Snyder still worked 16- to 18-hour days fighting the William Center. She is known to quote former boxing champ James Corbett: "The man who fights one more round is never whipped."

Snyder's strong personal appeal and network of friends and longtime county residents helped drum time county residents helped drum

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Sue Weaver/Journal

Annie Snyder visited the park just hours after learning she had been successful in saving the William Center tract.

President signs park legislation

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Development of the controversial William Center adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park has ended with President Ronald Reagan signing legislation seizing the land.

However, Prince William County will push the federal government to compensate it for the loss of about \$9 million worth of profits promised by the William Center developer.

The profits included a swimming pool, community center and other recreation activities, as well as \$2.25 million toward the design and construction of the proposed Route 234 bypass and interchange and \$150,000 for the county's schools.

The county contends the profits are property rights that are condemned along with the land. "The government has inherited those property rights," county attorney John Foote said Tuesday. He said staff members are working on the case and added, "We'll figure something out."

The White House announced Friday afternoon that late Thursday the president signed the Tax Technical Corrections Act, which included a provision for the federal government to take over the 542.7-acre tract in Prince William County. "That's it. The tract is now federal land," said Robert Kelly, spokesman for Hazel Peterson Co. of

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Amid the camaraderie, they vowed to continue their fight to other parks around the country under threat of development.

"This issue was not a no-growth issue. The question was on the importance of this historical place," said Ian Spatz, counsel to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a major force in the coalition.

If the past 10 months are any indication, their future causes will be successful, because Annie Snyder knows how to get her gun and rally the troops.

The tone of the battle was established early on.

Soon after developer John T. "Ty" Hazel began to build the William Center on his land last January, county officials defended their support of Hazel/Peterson Cos. and their decision to develop the property to the ire of preservationists.

When Hazel/Peterson, president James Todd proposed in late January its revised development plans to include a large shopping mall, County Executive Robert S. Noe called it "a happy announcement." Kathleen K. Seefeldt, D-Occoquan,

Teresh Boasberg, an attorney who represents the coalition.

Please see VICTORY, A4

Annie Snyder visited the park just hours after learning she had been successful in saving the William Center tract.



Following months of frenzied construction, the William Center tract is quiet after becoming part of the national park.

Steve Mawyer/Journal

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The White House announced Friday afternoon that late Thursday the president signed the Tax Technical Corrections Act which included a provision for the federal government to take over the 542.7-acre tract in Prince William County.

"That's it. The tract is now federal land," said Robert Kelly, spokesman for Hazel/Peterson Cos. of Fairfax, developer of the William Center. "We've said everything we have to say."

Work crews had neared completion of three model homes and sewer and other utility work at the site.

The Department of the Interior now owns the tract as part of the battlefield park. National Park Service rangers have patrolled the tract since Thursday night, said park superintendent Kenneth Apschmakin.

The selling price will be negotiated between Hazel/Peterson and the federal government. Congressional estimates put the price tag at between \$50 and \$150 million. If a price cannot be agreed upon, a federal judge will determine the compensation. The company purchased the property in 1986 for a reported \$8 million.

Please see BATTLE, A4

William Center goes to park

BATTLE from A1

The president's signature — in doubt to the end — brought a quiet close to a heated, 10-month battle that attracted national attention to the efforts to bring the disputed land into the park.

Hazel Peterson announced last January it was expanding its development plans to include a large regional shopping mall. The company's original plans were for houses and an office park.

With the support of the developer, the county approved a general mix-use zoning in 1986 that permitted a retail mall to be built.

Preservationists and Civil War buffs, led by Annie Snyder and the Save the Battlefield Coalition, immediately expressed outrage.

They charged that the proposed retail mall would scar the adjacent battlefield park and insisted the William Center tract is "hallowed ground."

The coalition got letters from more than 2,000 individuals and the backing of more than 40 preservation and historic groups across the country, and even attracted the attention of newspapers and people in Canada, Great Britain and other countries.

More than 80,000 people signed petitions in support of the buy out. It also got more than \$500,000 worth of legal and public relations services in battling the development.

"There aren't many [issues] that capture the national attention like this one," said Paul Pritchard, president of the National Parks and Conservation Association.

"A lot of Americans see their local parks and their local environments losing ground to the world development around them," Pritchard said. Snyder and other core members of the coalition gathered on the property after hearing of Reagan's approval Friday and again on Saturday afternoon.

"As long as you live and you walk here, you can take personal pride and say, 'I helped save this,'" a teary-eyed Snyder told the gathering of about 30 people Saturday.

She and others took the opportunity to attack county officials and developers who they said build recklessly without considering the impact on adjacent neighborhoods. Eying new tax revenues from the

development, Prince William County officials from the start resented federal interference in a controversy they said was a local land-use issue.

"I'm very disappointed," said Kathleen K. Seefeldt, D-Occoquan, chairman of the Board of County Supervisors. "I've said it so many times: I just don't think it was appropriate ... it is a very expensive decision."

However, Snyder said, "if they're going to point a finger, they have to point it at themselves. I think they are reaping what they sowed."

"We could have had it in 1980 for \$6 million had the local government not fought it," said Snyder, a 67-year-old Catharpin resident and former Marine officer.

County officials, who sought development of the tract then owned by the Marriott Corp., fought against inclusion of the land when the park was expanded in 1980. They promised that any development would not harm the park.

Despite celebrating their victory Saturday, coalition members vowed to press for federal legislation to save other historic sites from development.

"Don't think that because we won this battle, we can forget this site and go home," historian and coalition member Brian Pohanka told them Saturday.

A larger gathering is planned at the site next Saturday and will include several prominent members of Congress who helped get the buy out legislation through the House and up for a vote in the Senate.

The coalition had the backing of Rep. Frank Wolf, R-10th District, and colleagues Robert Mrazek, D-N.Y., and Michael Andrews, D-Texas. They pushed for a rarely-used procedure called "legislative taking" to stop the development and include the land in the park.

A proposal by Sen. John Warner, R-Va., to take part of the tract and save historic Stuart's Hill failed to get Senate support.

However, Warner and Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark., succeeded last month in tagging the buy out provision on the tax bill, along with more than 100 other amendments.

Reagan signed the bill over the opposition of Secretary of the Interior Donald P. Hodel, who questioned the historical value of the land.



Steve Sawyer/Journal



Steve Sawyer/Journal

National backing gains victory

VICTORY from A1

up the troops locally and nationally. The national attention gave their cause credibility.

"I would say it was 90 percent luck," said Snyder, noting the coalition was "up against all the power and the money."

The lack of compassion from the county and the developer made their efforts even more appealing to national groups and attracted the attention of many Americans, including coverage of the evening network news.

"Without a doubt, the local support is at the forefront of every organization," said Bruce Craig, cultural resources coordinator with the National Trust.

Key national historians, such as former park historian James Hennessy and Dr. James McPherson, took the chance to look in-depth at what happened on the tract during the first and second battles at the Manassas and fought to save the land.

"This was a number one priority," said Speitz of the National Trust. "It was very symbolic of the thousands of parks all around the

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country ... they know this is not an isolated incident."

"We wanted to make our stand at Manassas," he said.

As support grew across the country, several national figures came into the picture.

For Jody Powell, former press secretary to President Jimmy Carter, the controversy hit home — he had nine ancestors who fought in the battles at Manassas.

His public relations firm donated its efforts to help Annie and her troops get their message out, and his syndicated columns in newspapers around the country stirred much interest.

The national media had a field day when Rep. Morris K. Udall, D-Ariz., and a star in the field of preservation, expressed outrage at the mall plans when he toured the battlefield in March.

By then, several of his colleagues had thrown their support to the

coalition.

Reps. Robert Mrazek, D-N.Y., and Michael Andrews, D-Texas, proposed in late February to have the federal government take over the William Center tract.

Although Virginia's local representatives had kept mum while the controversy was debated in the national press, Republican Rep. Frank Wolf (R-10th) joined the forces when he proposed a stronger measure to Mrazek/Andrews and sought for an immediate taking of the property.

Wolf's successful efforts came after a failed compromise offered by Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel, who vehemently opposed including the land in the battlefield park.

The move by Hodel, although unsuccessful, helped the coalition's cause.

Said Boasberg, "It certainly gave the issue a lot of stature ... By focusing on Manassas, it certainly rose it to national attention. It was the first time that an important figure had said [Stuart's Hill] is important and we shouldn't have a mall on it."

Snyder's appealing demeanor and zeal served as a magnet for local and national reporters. Featured in

the New York Times, USA Today and Time magazine, she became a point of reference nationwide for a passion toward the Civil War.

"The Civil War touches a nerve in this country that no other war could touch," Boasberg said.

The mention of a Civil War battlefield projected strong emotions in many thousands of Civil War buffs, historians and the descendants of those who fought and died. The concept of a regional mall on the site of where Confederate and Union troops skirmished, where many of them died and possibly buried, angered them.

When Hazel upped the ante and threw bulldozers on the tract, the rage grew stronger.

The bulldozers "inflamed passions and led to a quick reaction of Congress. It made people angry that their hand was being forced," said Boasberg.

Despite the 10-month ordeal, the thought still brings tears to Snyder's eyes as she reflects on what happened on the land more than 125 years ago and what has occurred in the past 10 months.

"I got what I wanted and always wanted — that land in the park," said Snyder.