LTWC moving to 27 acres in South Lake Tahoe



This is an artist's rendering of what Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care will look like.

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care is moving from the founders' backyard that is less than 1 acre to 27 acres in South Lake Tahoe.

Tom and Cheryl Millham, who have run the wildlife rehabilitation facility for more than 36 years, were teary-eyed as they made the announcement May 17 at MontBleu casino during a break in the annual volunteer training.

Negotiations to buy the triangular-shaped parcel owned by Marjorie Springmeyer on Al Tahoe Boulevard near Pioneer Trail and the Pioneer Village housing development have been going on

since September. This is across from open space called the Springmeyer Land Conservancy.

The lease with an option to buy contract was signed May 15. The price has not been disclosed. Barbara Hartoonian left a substantial sum to LTWC that is allowing for the land acquisition. There is money for the first phase, but extensive fundraising will be required to build the facility the Millhams have been dreaming about for decades.



Cheryl and Tom Millham on May 17 announce the deal to move LTWC into the city limits. Photo/LTN

The money left by Hartoonian will only cover a fraction of the more than $10 million that the new facility plus lease is expected to cost.

Bonnie Springmeyer told *Lake Tahoe News* one of the driving reasons her mother-in-law decided to part with this parcel was because her friend Hartoonian believed in LTWC.

The elder Springmeyer turns 92 this summer. Her family – the Johnsons and that of her late husband Buzz's – were pioneers on the South Shore as well in the Carson Valley. They still own a tremendous amount of land in both locations.

It has not been decided what aspect of the facility will be

named after Springmeyer, but part of the deal is this will also be part of Marjorie Springmeyer's legacy.

This property was looked at 12 years ago, but Springmeyer was not ready to sell at that time.

The next step is to secure the necessary permits from the city and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. A zoning change will also be required.

The goal is to break ground in May 2015. Cages have been designed.

Phase one will be the rehabilitation center, including medical facility for the animals. It will also have caretaker's quarters. Denise Upton, who has been an instrumental part of LTWC in recent years, will take over for Executive Director Cheryl Millham.

"We will be advisers and counselors to the people running the facility," Tom Millham told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Millhams have wanted to retire for years. But they haven't been able to because the animals are in their backyard. It was in 2001 that El Dorado County told them they had to find another place for the center. It has taken this long to find a suitable location.

The second phase will include an education center that will have a conference center and gift shop.

Fencing will allow for animals that cannot return to the wild to live on site and give a different kind of educational experience for people.

"It will be great economic development for the community. It will give people another reason to stay and play," South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It will help diversify the economy."

She added, “It’s great recognition for one of the founding families of Lake Tahoe.”

Through the years, LTWC has taken in more than 24,000 animals, returned 15,000-plus to the wild, and has trained more than 2,000 people to help care for these animals. LTWC is California’s only rehab facility for bear cubs.