

## A scenic area is preserved, thanks to woman's generosity

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The bald eagle in the middle of the white sand road stood solid as a fire hydrant and towered like a sentinel above the level soybean fields on Hull Springs Farm.

When it finally took flight and heaved past my car's hood, a look of confidence burned clearly in its big, gold eyes.

That's when I pondered the qualities of the woman who had given all 637 acres of this scenic swath of Westmoreland County to Longwood University.

In a world where speculators and developers rake in fortunes by subdividing land, Mary Farley Ames Lee was different. She was like that eagle: She stood her ground.

"When she died in 1999, she left the farm to Longwood because she didn't want it developed," Bobbie Burton, vice president for university advancement and the farm's executive director, had told me earlier.

True to the bequest from Lee, an alumna from the class of 1938, Longwood is not just saving the farm, it is making it better.



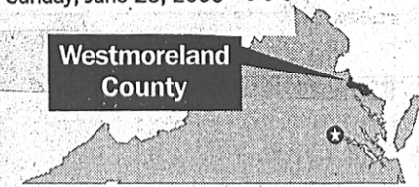
Staff writer Lawrence Latané III reports from The Times-Dispatch bureau in Warsaw. He covers the Northern Neck, part of the Middle Peninsula and the Chesapeake Bay.

Yet Hull Springs Farm is so grand, so remote and so entrancing, it is taking a team of environmental researchers, consultants and specialists to imagine just how the place can be improved.

Occupying a flat peninsula that overlooks the broad waters of Lower Machodoc Creek, the farm contains more than a mile of shoreline on Aimes and Glebe creeks along with fertile fields, tidal marshes and deep pine woods.

"There's virtually every habitat you might find on the entire Northern Neck right here," Burton said.

Longwood wants to improve that habitat, not only for the eagles, but for fu-



ture generations on the Northern Neck where growth and development will undoubtedly tax the region's celebrated quality of life.

That's why the university is using the property as an environmental classroom. Yesterday, Longwood held its second living-shoreline workshop aimed at area property owners to demonstrate environmentally sustainable ways to combat shoreline erosion.

David Burke, an environmental consultant from Maryland who is working with the university at the farm, has outlined more than a dozen alternatives to the framed wooden bulkheads and boulder riprap typically used to armor shores.

The common denominator to each one is a reliance on planted marsh grass to naturally stabilize the shoreline and promote water quality. The grasses soak up polluting nutrients from shoreline homes and provide needed habitat for the small fish and invertebrates that form the aquatic food chain important to a region devoted to waterfront living.

The university plans to install some of these ecological concepts on its own

shore so contractors, builders and homeowners can see them, learn about them and possibly leave inspired.

"People, sometimes, think doing things the environmentally sensitive way is more expensive," Burton said. "We hope to demonstrate that's not always the case."

Longwood students already use the farm as a field lab for biology, archaeology, ornithology and history.

Some day, Burton said, Longwood might create a nursery on the property to propagate smooth cord grass and other wetlands plants that can be sold for shoreline erosion control.

The school also intends to demonstrate environmentally friendly farming and forestry-management practices at Hull Springs, said Katie Register, who is Longwood's program director for the farm.

Ultimately, the university wants to restore wetlands on the acreage and create an environmental conference center to improve public understanding of land and resource stewardship.

That way, Lee's spirit can continue to soar with the eagles, the great blue herons and the ospreys that also share the property.

"Because we were gifted a resource like this, it's our obligation to be good stewards," Burton said.

"You don't find a setting like this every day."

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