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Bonita/Lee news

Koreshan property to remain undeveloped

Wednesday, October 21, 1998

By CHARLIE WHITEHEAD, Staff Writer

There's at least one small piece of Estero real estate that won't be developed any time soon.

Koreshan Unity Foundation Executive Director Sean Milks says the 76 acres the foundation wanted to sell to a local developer will instead lay fallow, thanks to the Second District Court of Appeals' recent rejection of the Koreshans' appeal of a lower court decision. The foundation had hoped to sell to local developer James Colosimo, but Circuit Judge Lynn Gerald ruled deed restrictions forbade development.

The appeal ruling comes on the heels of a state hearing officer's rejection of the foundation's request to build a footbridge over the Estero River to allow easy access from a parking lot on one side to the foundation's amphitheater on the other. Hearing officer Robert Meales agreed with locals who claimed the bridge would be environmentally damaging.

Milks said the foundation won't fight either decision.

"We'll just lay back in the weeds and let the environmentalists have their way," he said. "We'll have to bow to wiser heads on that. We certainly don't want to rape the landscape or anything like that."

Milks said the foundation never would have spent the money it did trying to build the footbridge if it realized it would be deemed an environmental mistake. As for the property - 600 feet of which fronts on U.S. 41 and might have been developed commercially but for the deed restrictions - Milks said the foundation simply doesn't have the more than \$10,000 an acre it would take to eradicate the extensive melaleuca and other invasive exotic vegetation.

The foundation had a deal with Colosimo to sell the land for \$3.3



million. The Koreshans deeded the land to the Nature Conservancy back in the 1960s for financial reasons. In the 1970s, the Conservancy deeded it back for its own financial reasons, but added restrictions to the deed mandating it be set aside as a preserve in perpetuity.

The foundation sued the Conservancy in 1995 to try to clear the title for the sale, but Gerald ruled against them. The recent appeals court ruling upholds Gerald's decision.

Milks said the foundation will continue its mission of preserving Koreshan heritage regardless.

"It would have helped, of course," he said of the \$3.3 million that's now not coming in. "But I don't think we're about to close our doors."

Milks said he's been with the foundation 10 years and never set foot on the property.

"I don't think anyone's been on that property for years," he said.



Feedback

Comments? Questions? Suggestions? E-mail the website crew at info@naplesnews.com. You can also use our [directory](#) to e-mail our staff directly. Or, express your opinion in a [letter to the editor](#).



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