

Willowsford Launches Nature Programs With LWC

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Staff Writer

Amid an area in a constant state of growth—with numerous mixed-use developments popping up, filling seemingly every crevice of eastern Loudoun County—it's unusual for a community to allocate a large percentage of its land strictly for nature use. But that's exactly the developer of Willowsford sought to do.

At one time developers envisioned building more than 16,000 homes on the 4,000-acre property, but the Willowsford team has different arrangements in mind.

"We said, well, if we have 4,000 acres, we don't want to develop all of it," Laura Cole, vice president of marketing for Willowsford, said. "We would build 2,100 homes in four villages, leaving an awful lot of open space."

The leftover space—2,000 acres, which equates to half of the community—has been put into a nonprofit conservancy called the Willowsford Conservancy, which has partnered with the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to bring nature-related amenities and programs to the community.

Donna Quinn, an LWC volunteer who is heading its joint venture with the Willowsford Conservancy, said her organization is supportive of Willowsford because of its commitment to conservation.

"What is interesting is other developments out there have said they want to do this, or say they are setting aside land for this, but don't really do it. Willowsford is really doing it," Quinn said. "LWC is excited about Willowsford because it is a model for developments where their whole founding principle is to develop with respect to the land and conservation."

Located along Rt. 50 between eastern and western Loudoun, Willowsford serves as a buffer for the two areas of the county. The community has four villages: The Grange, The Grant, The Grove and The Greens.

So far, 35 families live in Willowsford, which opened last October. The families—many of them from the Arlington and Alexandria areas—sat down with the Willowsford team to discuss programming they wanted for next year, and expressed



their excitement to become more involved with nature after living in urban environments, Cole said.

Likewise, Cole said the Willowsford team concluded from consumer research that the recession impacted the psychology behind people's way of living.

"People are very interested in local eating, making sure their food is sourced from what they consider safe or local—more and more translating into the farm-to-table movement," she said. "It's a big enough mainstream trend that we could leverage in this community."

To meet resident's desires, the community built the Willowsford Farm, which grows seasonal

Continued On Page 48

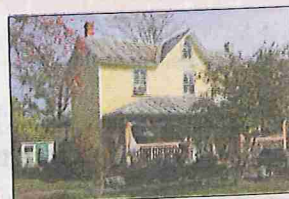


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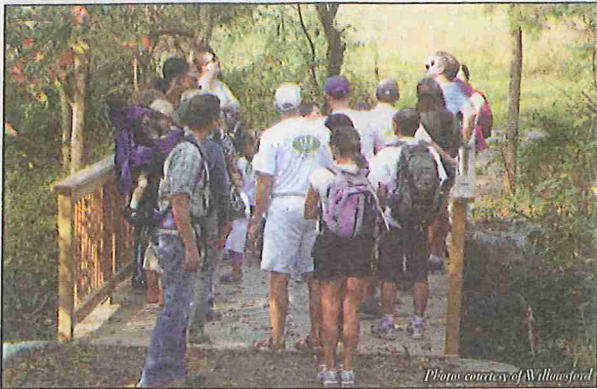


Photo courtesy of Willowsford

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— Donna Quinn

Willowsford

Continued From Page 47

produce, flowers and herbs. The farm features community supported agriculture shares—members of the program receive weekly shares of vegetables and fruits for 23 weeks, from June through Thanksgiving. This season, which is ongoing, provides shares to 50 people. Excess products are sold at Willowsford's food market stand.

In addition, the community has a campsite, as well as an extensive trail system spanning 45 miles, which is about a quarter of the way finished and is slated to be complete next year. The trails will seek to meet everyone's needs: There will be exposed-land trails for rigorous mountain biking trips, as well as paved trails for bicyclists, walkers, joggers and runners.

The Willowsford Conservancy has also partnered with REV3, a family-oriented adventure programming company that started out of Chantilly, to bring outdoor racing and geocaching events to the community.

Quinn plans to lead nature walks along the trails—she already hosted a walk during the Taste of Willowsford event at the beginning of the month—to teach people how to unite with nature, and identify local flora and fauna. She will also help the Willowsford Conservancy create preservation areas, where children from area schools can visit.

“I want to reconnect people with nature,” Quinn said. “We have lost that, and [Willowsford] is trying to develop that and nurture that with its residents right from the beginning.”

Concrete arrangements for the Willowsford Conservancy's programming will be available after the Willowsford team is finished putting together its business plan for next year. It is in the middle of the process, Cole said.

For more information about Willowsford, LWC and REV3, go to the organizations' websites: www.willowsford.com, www.loudounwild-life.org and www.rev3adventure.com.

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