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EDITORIAL

Laguna project leaders never gave up hope

The campaign to save eight acres of land on the Laguna de Santa Rosa, known as Palm Terrace, has succeeded in its first goal: to maintain the land in open space and spare it from development. The achievement of that goal is significant, and marks a successful grassroots effort to protect a key piece of the Laguna habitat located within the Sebastopol city limits.

While there is still a significant amount of money to be raised before the purchase of the land is complete, the close of escrow and the purchase of an open space easement means that the land will be kept in open space forever.

When this effort first got under way, and there was a \$1.5-million price tag placed on the property, buying the land seemed a daunting task. The Laguna Uplands Project organizers, however, never gave up hope. They raised money in every way imaginable, including bake sales, donation jars, dances and pleas for private donations and corporate and foundation grants. Their resolve and energy are largely responsible for the success of the project. The fact that the county's Open Space District saw fit to pay \$900,000 for a conservation easement was also a key part of the deal.

The Chilotti family also deserves credit for making this project successful. The family not only agreed to reduce the price of the property, but also agreed to carry a \$337,000 debt on the land for up to three years. It is clear that without the Chilotti family's cooperation and willingness, the campaign might never have succeeded.

With the property now assured of protection, the Laguna Uplands project can move forward with a plan for the land and completion of fundraising. Conflicts that arose during the process with members of the Native American community over management of the land can be resolved. Community input should be encouraged and incorporated into a master plan for the property.

Everyone involved in the project should be congratulated for their efforts, and the rest of us should look upon their success as an example of what can be accomplished with vision, determination and cooperation.