

A lot to celebrate

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Consider Madison Meadow saved.

It took four years and more than \$500,000, but neighbors dedicated to preserving the grassy 2-acre lot at Madison Street and West 22nd Avenue are ready to wrap up the fundraising phase of their project and shift the focus to planning community and habitat- restoration activities on the property.

“It’s been a lot of hard work, but it looks like we’re going to make it,” said Monroe Street resident Susan Jerde, who in 2003 helped form the Madison Meadow nonprofit group.

The organization needs to raise \$7,000 more for a \$40,000 grant to kick in. After that, it has until Dec. 31 to come up with an additional \$25,000 to pay off the mortgage on the parcel.

If the deadline passes before the needed money is raised, Jerde said the group can cover the shortfall and continue seeking donations into next year.

The contingency plan assures that the land will not be developed for housing.

That was property owner Eric Frye’s plan in 2003, when he hung the “For Sale” sign on the lot that sparked Jerde’s group to organize.

“When I saw that sign, I felt a pit in my stomach,” Jerde recalled. “I didn’t want to lose it, and I know lots of others felt the same way.”

Neighbors banded together immediately, and it took them about a year to raise \$216,000 in donations for a downpayment. They’ve kept the momentum going ever since.

Key to the early success was an anonymous \$100,000 donation.

But most of the rest has been generated through the group’s Web site, and at events such as garage sales and book sales. Group members have also trudged door-to-door to ask for help.

With the fundraising effort ending, the nonprofit group on Saturday began work on a project to create a habitat for Monarch butterflies in the meadow. About 20 local schoolchildren and their parents helped plant milkweed starts on the property.

John Hogan, of the Eugene-Springfield chapter of the North American Butterfly Association, supervised the project. He explained that milkweed is a host plant where female butterflies lay their eggs. Monarchs and milkweed are rare in the Willamette Valley.

Neighborhood resident Claire Femal, 11, planted three starts and appeared to grasp the importance of her work.

“There’s not that much milkweed around, and we need to do this to help the butterflies,” she said.

The Madison Meadow group wants to plant other native species on the property, along with flowers with nectar for butterflies to eat.

Besides restoration activities, the group wants to make the parcel available for school functions, community gatherings and general outdoor enjoyment. “It’s for both habitat and the community,” Jerde said. “People want to see open space in their neighborhood, and the best way to describe what we have here is to say that it’s private land held for the public benefit.”