

## NEWLIN

# Land enters conservation easement

Property once contained a 120-foot-tall pile of discarded trash, chemical solvents

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**NEWLIN** » A once-derided piece of property that was jokingly referred to as the highest peak in Chester County — because it contained a 120-foot-tall pile of discarded trash including chemical solvents, old linoleum and household garbage — has been transformed into part of the newest conservation easement project overseen by the Delaware County-based Natural Lands Trust.

In a press release, NLT officials spoke glowingly of the now preserved 211-acre property in Newlin known as Laurel Hill.

The property, owned by a local couple, surrounds 24 acres that was formerly the Strasburg Landfill, a contaminated Superfund site in Newlin and West Bradford that was closed more than two decades ago.

The conservation easement is believed to be the first of its kind in the country: the permanent

protection of many acres of desirable, undeveloped real estate surrounding a federal Superfund site by private, non-government parties.

“While at first glance, Laurel Hill might seem like an unlikely target for development, make no mistake about it: this property was at risk,” said NLT President Molly Morrison in the release. “Hundreds of subdivisions and shopping malls have been constructed on or adjacent to other Superfund sites across the country, including the infamous Love Canal. And the scenic and natural attributes of this land made it a priority for conservation.”

With towering oaks, maples and tulip trees overhead — a riot of color with their autumn-tinted foliage — and the cold, clear waters of Briar Run beneath, Laurel Hill is a sylvan paradise, the press announcement proclaimed. It is this beauty that prompted Laughton Company, a land-holding company owned by area res-

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KIRSTEN WERNER — COURTESY OF NATURAL LANDS TRUST

Pictured is a roadway through the former Strasburg Landfill, now surrounded by the newly preserved Laurel Hill property.

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idents by Cyndy and Barry Olliff, to purchase the property in 2007, according to NLT.

"We didn't want it to be developed," said Cyndy Olliff, a local equestrian. "We knew if we didn't step up, the developers would."

A few years later, the couple decided to go a step further to protect the land and contacted NLT. Last month, an agreement was finalized to place 159 acres under conservation easement with the conservation organization. Under an easement, property remains in private ownership, but is protected from future development in perpetuity.

According to the trust, the easement area includes 94 acres of high-quality deciduous woodlands that are bisected by Briar Run, a tributary to the West Branch of the Brandywine

Creek and one of a handful of trout-breeding streams in southeastern Pennsylvania. It also protects the scenic views along Laurel Road; the property includes more than 2,000 feet of road frontage.

For six years, the landfill accepted municipal and industrial waste, much to the consternation of neighbors who had fought its opening in the 1970s, and township officials, who complained to federal and state officials about violations at the landfill. An infamous site, it was closed in 1984. Between 1989, when it was declared a Superfund site, and 2001, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency capped and fenced-off the fill site and installed a collection and treatment system to mitigate contaminants leaching from the fill.

The state Department of Environmental Protection, which maintains the 24-acre retired landfill, has determined that the fill no longer poses a measurable risk to the surrounding community. Though the conservation easement does not include the landfill, it virtually surrounds the remediated site.

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## Charges

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