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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public and Private Partners Preserve the St. Michael's Property in Hopewell Township



St. Michael's Partners in Preservation

Surrounding an aerial photo of the St. Michael's Property are representatives from the coalition public and private partner organizations, led by D&R Greenway Land Trust, who worked to make its preservation a reality.

Seated left to right: **Jim Waltman**, Executive Director, Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association; **Susan Craft**, Executive Director, State Farmland Preservation Program; **Callie Considine**, Hopewell Borough resident and private fundraiser; **Patricia Sziber**, Executive Director, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Standing left to right: **Mark Solomon**, Partner, Pepper Hamilton LLP and Pro Bono Attorney for D&R Greenway; **Paul Anzano**, Mayor, Hopewell Borough; **Brian Hughes**, Mercer County Executive; **Michael Markulec**, Mayor, Hopewell Township; **David Knights**, Hopewell Borough Council President; **Linda Mead**, Executive Director D&R Greenway Land Trust; **Leslie Davis Potter**, Chair, St. Michael's Preservation Committee; **Vanessa Sandom**, Hopewell Township Committee; **Robert Johnston**, D&R Greenway Trustee; **Renée Jones**, *Central Team Leader, NJDEP Green Acres Program*

Princeton, NJ, January 26, 2010 – On January 19th, the deeds were signed that provide for the permanent preservation of the 340- acre St. Michael's property in Hopewell.

Bordering the Borough of Hopewell to the south and east, the land encompasses 340 acres of farm fields and woodlands. Largely undisturbed since the Hopewell Valley was settled over 300 years ago, this property provides a direct link to the Borough's agricultural history -- and a beautiful, signature viewscape and for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The land is known as "St. Michael's" because the St. Michael's Orphanage and Industrial School was built on the property in 1896. The facility closed in 1973, but the land remained open and undeveloped. In 2004, the

Roman Catholic Diocese of Trenton approached D&R Greenway Land Trust to see if a viable solution could be found to preserve the land as an alternative to selling the property to developers.

“The preservation of this property will forever safeguard the unique charm and character enjoyed by Hopewell Borough and Township today,” commented D&R Greenway Land Trust Board Chair Richard Goldman.

According to Rayanne Bennett, spokesperson for the Diocese of Trenton, “We are extremely pleased to have had a role in this effort to preserve open space in Hopewell through the sale of the St. Michael’s Orphanage property. It is fitting that this land, which once served the needs of so many children, will now bring enjoyment to the wider community. It has been a privilege to work with D&R Greenway and its partners in putting together this sale, and we are particularly grateful to our attorney Dave Roskos, who worked very hard these past few years to bring this to fruition.”

D&R Greenway Land Trust led the preservation effort with a coalition of public funding partners that included the New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee (Farmland Preservation Program), the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program, Mercer County, Hopewell Township and Hopewell Borough.

Together, the above mentioned public funding partners contributed more than \$8 million toward the \$11 million purchase price of the land.

Private Fundraising Closed the Gap

In the summer of 2006, a group of concerned residents of Hopewell Borough and Township stepped forward to help D&R Greenway raise the remaining funds required to preserve the St. Michael’s land. The St. Michael’s Preservation Committee’s campaign began in September 2006 at the Hopewell Harvest Festival where the community was first made aware of the threat to develop St. Michael’s.

Leslie Davis Potter, Chair of the St. Michael’s Preservation Committee commented, “Community support for preserving St. Michael’s was phenomenal as was the dedication and enthusiasm of the Committee and the coverage in *The Hopewell Valley News*. Many grass-roots fundraising events were held – concerts, auctions and block parties. *Support from over 800 individuals poured in.* On Halloween night 2006, Callie Considine, a fourth grade student at Hopewell Elementary School, went door-to-door in her neighborhood collecting funds. Her commitment to the project grew and in total, she collected over \$3,300 – truly an inspiration for young people.”

Additional contributions provided by Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space and the Stony-Brook Millstone Watershed Association and private contributions from The Willard T. C. Johnson Foundation, The Larson Land Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb and The Bunbury Company – and over 800 individuals – completed the \$11 million acquisition.”

“The preservation of this property protects more than 200 acres of farmland that will serve as an important agricultural resource for the surrounding community,” said Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher, who chairs the State Agriculture Development Committee. “As a result, we were pleased to provide an approximately \$3 million grant – the largest we have ever awarded to a nonprofit organization – to partner in the preservation of this land, which was among the largest remaining unprotected farms in Mercer County.”

Given current zoning regulations in Hopewell, the St. Michael’s land could have easily played host to 150 houses. A less likely, but legally permissible “worst case scenario” would have seen the site developed as a hamlet; this would have meant that up to 1,020 homes could have been built, with provisions for up to 76,000 square feet of office or commercial space. Development under hamlet designation would have more than

doubled the existing number of households in Hopewell Borough, completely transforming the lifestyle the residents of this historic village enjoy today.

"Preserving St. Michael's has been a priority of the Borough of Hopewell for many years – and the primary reason the Borough established its local open space tax nearly a decade ago," said Council President David Knights. "Permanently protecting the green belt at our borders is a critical element in our Master Plan because it not only preserves the character and landscape of Hopewell Borough for generations to come, but also because it conserves vital lands and natural resources", he added. "The entire Hopewell Borough community supported this effort and we are very grateful to D&R Greenway and to all of our partners that we have reached this very successful conclusion".

An Ecologically-Significant and Historic Landscape

Beyond its 220 acres of active farmland and prime agricultural soils, the St. Michael's property encompasses a wide variety of environmental resources. Fallow fields and floodplains provide grassland, hedgerow and shrubland habitats for many species of birds. Wooded areas support mature trees that restore oxygen to the air and support the collection of ground water into aquifers. The Bedens Brook and its four tributaries cross the property providing scenic stream corridor habitat before emptying into the D&R Canal, helping to support an important source of drinking water for our region.

"It is a rare opportunity to preserve such a large, contiguous piece of property in New Jersey, and we were glad to join the many partners who contributed to this environmental victory," said Department of Environmental Protection Acting Commissioner Bob Martin. "This property embodies all the benefits achieved from preserving open space - enhanced recreational opportunities, protected wildlife habitat and clean air and water."

The Path to Preservation

It took more than six years to bring the St. Michael's project to a successful conclusion. According to D&R Greenway Executive Director Linda Mead, "In the 20 years of D&R Greenway's history this was by far the most intricate preservation project we've ever encountered."

The St. Michael's preservation project had the greatest number of public and private funding partners of any project D&R Greenway has ever worked on. In addition, two dump sites on the property – one associated with the original orphanage and farm and the other an illegal site off Aunt Molly Road – needed to be cleaned up to meet NJDEP standards before the state agencies would release funding. This work took two years to complete, with excellent results. In fact, the former Aunt Molly Road site will be transformed into a one-acre grove filled with native trees and shrubs, to become a model for studying the effects of carbon sequestration.

D&R Greenway's Board Chair Richard Goldman commented, "We would especially like to thank Bob Harris and his company ENVIRON, Inc. for donating their services to D&R Greenway and advising us during the clean-up process. We also thank Mark Solomon of Pepper Hamilton LLP, pro bono attorney for D&R Greenway, who provided countless hours of legal counsel throughout the course of this project."

"The preservation of the St. Michael property is a tremendous success story and provides a roadmap for public/private conservation moving forward" said Hopewell Township Mayor Michael Markulec. "D&R Greenway Land Trust, in cooperation with other non-profit organizations, local business, community groups, and municipal and county governments and the state came together to protect this environmentally sensitive property while also maintaining our history and agricultural heritage."

Looking to the Future

First and foremost, D&R Greenway will continue to farm St. Michael's. As they have been since Hopewell was settled over 300 years ago, the fields of this landscape will continue to be used for productive farming.

The wooded acres on the property support biodiversity and a healthy environment, safeguarding water resources and wildlife habitat. These non-agricultural open space acres can also provide a wealth of recreational opportunities. Plans are underway to identify trails through the non-agricultural portions of the property, for walking, horseback riding and nature study. St. Michael's could, in time, become the hub for a regional trail network, linking to Princeton, Pennington and up into the Sourlands.

The preservation of the St. Michael's property provides an amazing resource and benefit for the residents of Hopewell Borough and Township, Mercer County – indeed for all citizens of New Jersey.

Brian M. Hughes, Mercer County Executive observed, "Mercer County is pleased to be a partner in the preservation of this significant open space and farm parcel. In the current economic times, no one entity could have preserved this without the help of others and the significant contribution of individuals."

D&R Greenway Executive Director Linda Mead added, "D&R Greenway Land Trust would like to acknowledge the perseverance of all our public partners, who worked side-by-side with us to see this project through, and the patience of all of our donors, who have eagerly anticipated the preservation of St. Michael's."

That day has finally come. D&R Greenway is planning a community celebration in the early summer to introduce the beauty of the landscape to everyone. The date and time will be announced in the spring.

Please note: D&R Greenway asks anyone who wants to see the property to stay on existing farm roads until trails have been marked and informational signs posted. Please visit only during daylight hours.

For the latest information about plans for St. Michael's and information about D&R Greenway Land Trust please visit www.drgreenway.org.