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‘A real community barn-raising’: Local landmark restored

By Hunter Cresswell



The Northcoast Regional Land Trust held a grand opening of the restored Graham-Long Dairy barn in Freshwater on Sunday afternoon. Hunter Cresswell — The Times-Standard

More than 100 people attended Sunday afternoon’s grand opening of the newly restored Graham-Long Dairy barn on Freshwater Farms Reserve.

People ate catered goodies, drank wine and beer, listened to live music and talked about the historic building itself. And all this went on under the watchful eye of a lone barn owl in the rafters.

“She must like music and noise,” Northcoast Regional Land Trust executive director Dan Ehresman joked during his speech. The owl had stuck around through the construction process.

What used to be a dilapidated, sagging structure along Myrtle Avenue now stands tall and proud thanks to the NCRLT, which oversaw the project, and a bevy of local people and businesses that donated time, money and materials.

“About a year and a half ago, we didn’t think this barn would make it to this day,” Ehresman said.

Work on the project started in summer 2016, he said.

“The land trust has been talking about this for several years prior to construction,” Ehresman said.

With the improvements made to the doors, walls, roof and windows, he said he hopes the barn will “last a darn long time.”



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Built in 1910, the barn entered the land trust's possession in 2005, purchased along with 74 acres of land now known as the Freshwater Farms Reserve.

"The board elected to see this nice old barn be restored rather than gradually decompose," NCRLT board member Clif Clendenen said.

He estimated about \$200,000 went toward the project.

"It's just kind of a classic of the property," Clendenen said. "It's just an iconic old barn, and we wanted to make sure we saved it."

The barn isn't all the land trust has done at the Freshwater Farms Reserve. It also restores wildlife habitat and salt marshes, maintains trails, and leases to ranchers so cattle can graze.

"We're done pretty significant restoration on Wood Creek," NCRLT board member Rees Hughes said.

"Part of this is to make it working land."

Ehresman said the land trust will call for proposals in the next two weeks from people or businesses interested in leasing the barn.

"We're going to be flying that soon and seeing what the community wants," he said, stating that whoever leases it must be consistent with the reserve's present agricultural and public uses.

"This whole property has a history of agricultural use," Ehresman said

He said the grand opening served to honor all the people and businesses that donated to the efforts to get the barn this far.

"This event is really a celebration of a real community barn-raising," Ehresman said.

Visit ncrlt.org for more information.