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Adoption agency may buy Camp Montvale

By Joel Davis

A Maryville-based adoption agency is seeking to purchase the former **Camp Montvale** property off **Montvale** Road.

Harmony Adoptions of Tennessee has reached a tentative agreement with Knoxville auctioneer Sam Furrow, who foreclosed on the property in 2009 after buying out the debt of a financially-struggling development group, to possibly buy the **camp**.

The adoption agency plans to rename the property the "**Montvale** Retreat Center." It will be used to provide therapeutic activities after school and during the summer to adopted children in East Tennessee, according to the Harmony Adoptions website. It will also develop culture **camp**s for internationally adopted children, host trainings for child welfare and clinical professionals and schedule events throughout the year that open the **Montvale** Retreat Center to community use.

"We're pretty excited about it," Executive Director Pam Wolf said. "I'm very optimistic. I know we can run it. I'm optimistic we can raise the money to buy it."

Harmony Adoptions is planning to kick off a fundraising effort at the end of the month. "It is a major undertaking," Wolf said. "What we have to do is basically rebuild a lot of it. There is no heat and air. It's a summer **camp**. We want to use it year round. There's a lot of work that is going to have to be done."

Rick Hinchey, CEO of Furrow Services LLC, said, "We have a tentative agreement in place. It's all contingent until we close on everything. We still plan on doing a conservation easement. They would be coming in as an owner/operator of it. They would be using it as part of their programs. Potentially, they could be purchasing a portion of it after the easement is laid down."

Details of the agreement were not available, but, if they come to fruition, it will end the dream of the Friends of **Camp Montvale** group to reopen the **camp**. In a statement released Wednesday, however, Executive Director Bryan Roberson said his organization's board supports Harmony Adoptions' plans for the **camp**.

"The Friends of **Camp Montvale** have been working diligently since 2005 to see **Montvale** returned to our community serving children and families. We are very proud of our work in helping to facilitate a better future for the **Montvale** property. Our vision for **Camp Montvale** is to see this historic site return to serving children, families and the community at large. There could not have been a better match than Harmony Adoptions. They recognize the value of **camp**-based therapeutic programming. **Camp** changes lives for the better!

"However, it is not just the facility but the people involved that changes people's lives. Harmony Adoptions recognizes this and will be dedicated to running safe quality programs in a beautiful and supportive environment. Harmony Adoptions recognizes the history and personal attachments that we all have to this unique place. They are committed to working to see how the **Montvale** Retreat Center can serve the wider community. I look forward to seeing a great future for **Montvale** as lives continue to be changed through caring people. The Friends of **Camp Montvale** give their full support

and ask the community and alumni to support Harmony Adoptions as they complete their plans for **Camp Montvale**'s return to service.”

The YMCA of East Tennessee began operating **Camp Montvale** in 1948 but closed the facility in 2005. A development group, Harmony Property, purchased the property the next year, giving the Friends of **Camp Montvale** a chance to operate a youth **camp** on the site. The Harmony group spent \$4 million to purchase the property, \$3.4 million of the total financed by a promissory note to the YMCA itself.

Financing for the purchase had been secured with proceeds of the development of a 281-acre site close to the **camp** property called The Overlook at **Montvale**, but Harmony Property found itself in financial straits after the near-collapse of the national economy. Furrow stepped in, purchasing the debt in 2008, in order to buy time for the Friends of **Camp Montvale** to raise funding to purchase the property outright, but that never materialized. On Sept. 1, Furrow transferred the debt to the **Camp** Investment LLC. He serves as chief manager of the company.

Camp Montvale is located off **Montvale** Road just past Six Mile Church, at the foot of Chilhowee Mountain.