

## Owner wants mountain camp preserved, enjoyed

By Josh Flory

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It may be true that you can't go home again, but Sam Furrow is proof that you can go back to camp.

The Knoxville developer, auctioneer and car dealer recently bought the approximately 360-acre Camp Montvale, a Blount County property located at the base of Chilhowee Mountain.

Furrow, the chairman of Furrow Auction Co., was a counselor at the camp for five summers during his youth, and said his goal is to find a user that recognizes its value, can afford to buy it and has the fundraising resources to take advantage of the facilities that are already there.

Furrow said the property has "exceptional value," but he is also interested in protecting it for the long term. Toward that end, the businessman is planning to seek a conservation easement that would limit future development rights on the property. And since he can't afford to give it away, Furrow said, "we've got to figure out some way to find a good user of it that has the resources to basically buy it and utilize it. But I'm just not going to sell it to a developer or anybody like that."

The property took a winding path before ending up in Furrow's possession. It had been owned by the YMCA of East Tennessee, but that agency sold it in 2006. According to the Daily Times newspaper, that transaction was partly financed by the Y itself, and Furrow acquired the mortgage in 2008.

While he has a history with Camp Montvale, Furrow said the reason he bought the mortgage was to provide cash for the YMCA to finish its new facility at the Jefferson Park subdivision in West Knoxville. After acquiring the note, Furrow foreclosed on the property last year, and submitted the winning bid of more than \$3.8 million at

auction. The YMCA no longer operates at the site - which has a swimming pool and multiple buildings, including cabins, a large dining hall and directors' houses - and Furrow said it probably won't be used this summer.

Furrow's acquisition was also good news for a nonprofit organization that advocates on behalf of the property. Bryan Roberson, executive director of Friends of Camp Montvale, said his organization was involved in bringing Furrow into the deal, noting the developer's history with the camp and saying Furrow "has a vested interest in seeing that property preserved in its natural setting and environment."

Asked what his group would see as an ideal outcome to the situation, Roberson said it wants to the property preserved and re-opened for community use.

"Primarily, of course, we want to see that land serving children again," he said. "But also (we want to) see that expanded out to serving adults and community groups, just because that land has so much opportunity and value to the community."

Furrow said the property could be used for camping, retreats or meetings, and he also floated the possibility that four or five different users could be involved.

"It's got to be used by somebody who can utilize the facilities and the environment and the aesthetics of the whole place," he said.