

# THE ASPEN TIMES

## Clarks preserve a piece of Emma

By Scott Condon

April 19, 2006

Ranches in the area most often make the news these days when developers carve them into ranchettes or convert them into residential-golf projects.

Tom and Linda Clark made sure their Emma spread was newsworthy for a different reason. They donated a conservation easement on 110 acres earlier this month to the Aspen Valley Land Trust.

"It pretty much squelches all the development rights on our ranch, which is exactly what we wanted to do," said Tom Clark, a businessman who owns Clark's Markets in Aspen, Basalt and other towns in Colorado and Utah.

The Clarks' gift was in the neighborhood of \$2 million, which he said is a few more zeroes than what he's used to giving. "It's one of the largest assets we own," he said.

The Clarks retained a 10-acre building envelope around their existing home. The conservation easement allows agricultural operations to continue indefinitely on the ranch, but it removes the possibility of the Clarks or anyone else developing the land.

Shannon Meyer, associate director of Aspen Valley Land Trust, said the Clark property was worthwhile to preserve for several reasons. Large parts of it are visible from Highway 82 and areas around Emma. It has the potential to provide access to public lands in the area known as the Crown. Elk graze in pastures and wildlife regularly travel through the land.

"Emma is an important area for us," Meyer said.

Clark has further plans to preserve Emma ranchland. He and partner Tom McCloskey bought 560 acres of the Fender Ranch late last year. Clark arranged the \$4.75 million deal in a risky move to prevent the purchase and extensive development of the ranch, which is adjacent to his.

His said negotiations are continuing with the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails program on the sale of conservation easements on about 525 acres of the former Fender Ranch, now known as Crown Mountain Ranch. Aspen Valley Land Trust will also play a role in the preservation effort, Meyer said.

McCloskey and Clark will retain the historic ranch house site on the property as well as two 20-acre parcels on the east side of Sopris Creek Road. The road separates those parcels from the bulk of the ranch. They will be sold for single-family-home lots.

Clark said his goal is for the 110 acres of his ranch to integrate with the 525 acres of the Crown Mountain Ranch as one of the largest pieces of open space in the midvalley.

"It was a chance for us to give back, and we took it," he said.

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Tom and Linda Clark pose at their ranch on Sopris Creek Road outside Basalt recently. (Paul Conrad/The Aspen Times)



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