

Morristown making Hillcrest Ave. park

By Dylan Lyons
For the Daily Record

MORRISTOWN — The town will preserve land on Hillcrest Avenue to serve as a gathering place for neighbors and housing a playground.

Mayor Timothy Dougherty spoke Wednesday, on the lot at 20 Hillcrest Ave., addressing residents, neighbors, town and state lawmakers, and members of the family that owned the land, regarding the property.

Dougherty said his administration had to work through a number of obstacles to find funding for this project.

"We all know what the economy's like. We all know the burden on the taxpayer," Dougherty said. "But we were able to preserve this piece of property, which I think will go down in the history books."

An abandoned white house, once belonging to Milton and Bertha Kleitman, sits on the property and soon will be demolished. The Kleitmans moved there in the 1940s and gradually purchased the surrounding parcels to protect them from developers. The two-acre prop-

erty, which the family sold to the town for \$350,000, will be named after the Kleitmans for their dedication to preserving it.

"As a family, we're very excited that the land will stay intact," said Naomi Kleitman, the original owner's granddaughter, who drove from Maryland for the announcement. Naomi's sister, Linda Mermelstein, also attended with her daughter.

A number of neighbors have been active in negotiations, from the time the property was abandoned seven years ago.

Neighbor Bob Parker said he went to the Town Council numerous times to talk about the project, which included persuading them to approve a steep slope ordinance, prohibiting development on properties with slopes that exceed 15 percent, like 20 Hillcrest, which backs up to a substantial hill overlooking Morristown.

"This is like my legacy," Parker said, "Because it's always going to be here."

The preservation falls under the guidelines of the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, which was completed in 2011 and identifies the need to pro-



Naomi Kleitman (left) and Linda Mermelstein attend Wednesday's ceremony regarding land their grandparents owned.

ONLINE

For a photo gallery from the Morristown event, log on to DailyRecord.com.

vide park amenities within residential neighborhoods.

Samantha Rothman, chairwoman of the Morristown Environmental Commission, was a major advocate for the project. She said the open space and playground will be an asset to Hillcrest residents.

"Morristown has a tradition of neighborhood parks, and this neighborhood has a lot of small children. We're filling a need in the community," Rothman said.

Dougherty emphasized the bipartisan efforts that allowed the project to be a viable one. He pointed out



Lisa Stern of the state Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program and Morristown Mayor Timothy P. Dougherty hold a Green Acres sign on Wednesday after Dougherty announced the creation of a park at 20 Hillcrest Ave. BOB KARP/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

that both Democrats, including himself and Town Council President Michelle Dupree Harris, and Republicans, such as former Morris County Freeholder Margaret Nordstrom and state Assemblyman Anthony M. Bucco, who attended the event and supported of the project.

"This is a great day for Morristown," Bucco said. "It's the product of a number of different agencies working to get a job done. That's what we're elected to do."

Dougherty and Rothman also announced

Wednesday the implementation of an Urban Forest Health Initiative, a plan to maintain and repopulate Morristown's tree canopy — all trees on streets and in public parks — in the wake of severe damage inflicted during last year's storms.

The town has approved \$100,000 to jumpstart the initiative and will be holding meetings within the next couple of months to discuss the plan.

"Ensuring Morristown has healthy trees will make Morristown a more attractive place to visit and live," Dougherty said.