



HEIRS
PROPERTY

MATTERS

Unique Lowcountry Outing & Feast
at McLeod Plantation - Sat. Dec. 1st [Noon-5PM]
Tx. Call Brett [843]745-7055

*Know Your Tax
Status...you may be
paying too much!*

*Dolly was paying 6% in taxes on her
primary residence instead of 4%...
until the Center stepped in.*

[See page 4 for full story]

WHAT IS HEIRS' PROPERTY?

Most heirs' property in the Lowcountry is land that was either purchased by or deeded to African Americans after emancipation. Much of this land has been passed down through

This unstable form of ownership puts heirs' property at high risk for loss because any heir can sell his/her percentage of ownership to another who can force a sale of the entire property.

the generations without the benefit of a will so that the land is owned in common by all of the heirs - whether they live on the land; help pay the taxes, or have never set foot on the land.



A Note From Jennie

It's More Than Land

In 2016, I had the pleasure of presenting a TEDx talk entitled - "Heirs Discover that Money Does Grow on Trees." Forestry is a \$123B industry in the Southern Region of the USDA Forest Service, which is also known as the "wood basket of the world."

Since 2013, the Center has focused its efforts to help under-served landowners recognize that the value of their forestland is more than just trees. Healthy forests provide clean drinking water, wildlife habitats, and help clean the air.

Making your land more productive through tree farming does not only benefit you and your heirs, but your community, our region and the world.

That is what I call IMPACT - both economical and environmental.

MISSION: *To protect heirs' property and to promote the sustainable use of land to provide increased economic benefit to historically under-served landowners through legal and forestry education and direct services.*

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A Timely Tale...A Season of Hurricanes



Bringing the Forest Back to Life - Mary Hill is proud to share her tree farming story with Chuck Leavell. (See page 1 for Leavell story)

Mary's husband inherited his 43-acre homestead from his grandfather, who received it as part of the "40 acres and a mule" reparation following Emancipation.

Later, his uncle verbally said that he would give his 69 acres to him, when he returned from his duty as a merchant marine. "But, it was never in writing," said Mary. "And his uncle died at sea."

Still, they kept paying the taxes, and the trees matured and were ready for harvest. "We had cut some trees from time to time but always for far less than they were worth," Mary said. "We thought about cutting them when our son was going to college to help pay for it, but we decided to wait.

Then, Hurricane Hugo [1989] struck and destroyed all of the trees on the 69 acres. "We were devastated. It was a complete loss. The trees were all lying on the ground. It was a mess."

They didn't know what they should or could do. No one spoke of benefits or claims they might make.

"My husband never got over the loss of those trees".

Years later, Mary, now widowed, heard about the Center's forestry program while attending a church conference at St. Luke AME Church in Charleston. She was wary at first.

"So many people had gotten ripped off, when they had their trees cut, but I kept following

what the Center was doing and then I got to know some of the people who were in the program."

It takes time to believe. Much of the Center's success is due to the gradual building of trust between staff and landowners like Mary. "It helped to see that others were participating," Mary said. "I knew that Louis Manigault was part of the program and respected him."

Today, Mary is managing 88 forested acres. She has planted long leaf and loblolly pine and has become a Center "Woodlands Community Advocate" [WCA] to help others believe in what the Center is doing — by telling her story. Mary is a proud member and is sure that her late husband is proud of what she has done with their family land.



6% to 4% Property Tax Status Makes a BIG Difference



Saving money is no laughing matter!
Dolly [L.] and Center Attorney Renee Gregory

Dolly's property was owned by her husband who died in 2016 without a will. After she opened her husband's probate in September of 2017, she received the property tax bill for her home. Her county of residence had billed her at 6% rather than 4%. Her taxes jumped from \$579 to \$2,184!

Dolly had originally come to the Center for help probating her husband's estate, but the problem of her tax status took center stage. An application for the 4% Legal Residence tax status was completed and submitted for her, but the county denied her stating that she had no ownership in the property — even though she was in the process of probating her husband's estate and

would inherit 50% ownership interest as the surviving spouse.

"The County told me I had to come up with all that money for the taxes," said Dolly, still alarmed to think about it. At that point, Center Attorney Renee Gregory made several calls and sent emails to the assessor's office. "I explained that she was the surviving spouse; that the probate was open, and that she met all of the requirements

"There are so many benefits and tax deductions that people qualify for, but do not know that they exist or how to get them," said Gregory.

to qualify for a 4% Legal Residence assessment," said Gregory.

**Remember AG land is
also taxed at 4%!
Call us to see if we
can help you at:
(843) 745-7055.**

After another refusal, Gregory then filed an objection on Dolly's behalf and she was finally approved with the tax status adjusted going forward and retroactively for 2017.

After the adjustment, for legal residence, the property taxes were still higher than they had been prior to the death of Dolly's husband. So, Dolly saved more money by applying for the Homestead Exemption for legal resident homeowners over the age of 65, totally and permanently disabled, or legally blind.

"I don't know what I would have done without the Center's help," said Dolly—all smiles.



Center STARS are rising!

Page 7 Photo Credit: James Edward Mills of the Joy Trip Project



Finding Family History In County Records

Joe Hamilton [L.] and Chuck Leavell

Chuck Leavell was here! Keyboardist for the Allman Brothers, The Rolling Stones and many others, Leavell is also an acclaimed conservationist and passionate tree farmer. He was in the Lowcountry to film an episode of his PBS show, "America's Forests", which highlighted three Center landowners: Mary Hill [see page 4], Joe Hamilton and Yvonne Knight-Carter and a special walk through the Francis Marion Forest with USDA NRCS Associate Chief Leonard Jordan.

"Doing our third episode of "America's Forests" in South Carolina with the focus on the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation organization was an inspiring eye-opener for me," said Leavell. "The Center has helped over a thousand minority forest land owners to not only make sure they can keep their lands in their families, but to enhance them and instill pride for their efforts. This is a great thing for our forests, for these incredible families and for our country."

SPECIAL THANKS to the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, and the USDA NRCS and Forest Service for funding the Center's "Sustainable Forestry and African Land Retention" program and this episode of "America's Forests." Stay tuned for PBS air date and time!



The Francis Marion Forest Treasure

Chuck Leavell [L.], District Ranger Rhea Whalen, and USDA NRCS Associate Chief Leonard Jordan talk TREES!



Land Holds Stories

Leavell with sisters - Eleanor C. Brown [C.] and Yvonne Knight-Carter, sitting on the steps of the renovated one-room schoolhouse built on land their grandmother gave for the school.

MATTERS

THANK YOU! YOUR GIVING MATTERS...in every way that you do it!

Please consider making a monthly gift. For us...it feels like a pat on the back every time it appears!

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If we have left anyone out, please let us know and accept our sincere apologies.

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2019 "Commitment to Justice" Event Will Honor Armand Derfner, Esquire



On Thursday, March 21, 2019, the Center will honor Attorney Armand Derfner at its "Commitment to Justice" Award Reception at the Francis Marion Hotel [387 King St.] from 7:30-8:00PM.

Derfner has epitomized the pursuit of justice through his legal career, specializing in civil rights law and class actions, especially in the areas of labor, employment, and consumer law. He has been practicing civil rights law for 40 years, and helped shape

the Voting Rights Act through his Supreme Court arguments in several of the earliest cases, including *Allen v. State Board of Elections* [1969] and *Perkins v. Matthews* [1971], as well as many other voting rights cases...and there is much more.

Please join us to honor Attorney Derfner and support the Center! To become a Sponsor or reserve tickets, contact Brett Wadford, Director of Development at: [843] 745-7055 / bwadford@heirsproperty.org.

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Congratulations to the 2018 "Woodlands Community Advocate" Graduates: (From Left) Samuel Boyd, Sr. & Julia Boyd, John N. Hill, Robert Middleton, Robert Jones, John Matthews and Ethel Jefferson.



*Planting Trees Is Important Work!
Center Forester Trey Bailey [L.] and Leavell show Ms. Mary Hill's grandchildren,
Jonathan [4] and Jennifer [6], how to use a dibble to plant seedlings.*



*Please welcome our brand new Director of Development
Brett Wadford. Expect a call!
He wants to meet EVERYONE!*