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Cross-Examination: Sustaining the Environment and the YMCA

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Goldman was one of six people to receive this year's Princeton Family YMCA's Centennial Award. He recently spoke about winning the award, named for the YMCA's 100-Year milestone, which recognized "people who have made a difference in our region by demonstrating outstanding commitment and leadership to environmental advocacy and stewardship, sustainability, conservation and other green initiatives."

Q: Congratulations on your recent award. What is the D & R Greenway Land Trust?

A: The Greenway Land Trust was created about 21 years ago to preserve natural lands and open space, at the time solely in Central New Jersey. It had a particular focus on habitat corridors and water quality protection for streams that fed the D and R Canal. Over the years, that mission has broadened to cover natural land preservation and stewardship, concentrated in Central New Jersey, but really throughout the state. I joined the board 20 years ago.

Q: How does the program work?

A: The way the program works, in large part, is we take advantage of New Jersey Green Acres, which provides non-profit grants for open space acquisition.

Q: What was the land trust's first acquisition?

A: As a volunteer attorney and trustee, I did the first non-profit grant-funded acquisition in New Jersey. It was in a place called McBurney woods in East Amwell. That was project number one out of hundreds of projects totaling 14,000 acres in Central and Southern Jersey, valued in excess of \$300 million. It is very gratifying from going from closing number one to 14,000 acres. It's awesome.



Hikers explore St. Michael's Walk in Hopewell. Goldman helped preserve the property, which used to be owned by the Diocese of Trenton.



Richard Goldman



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Q: What is a project you are particularly proud of?

A: About seven or eight years ago we preserved the estate of Robert Wood Johnson. He had a home on 60 acres in Princeton. We gave the property to Princeton as a park, but the land trust retained an old barn. About five years ago, we renovated it and turned it into the Johnson Education Center. It's a place where Greenway has its headquarters and other organizations have meetings there.

Q: Any others?

A: The most recent is -- and the great news is it is supposed to close soon -- called the St. Michael's property. It is in Hopewell Township on the border of Hopewell Borough. It's 500 acres. That's larger in landmass than all of Hopewell Borough. The Diocese of Trenton owned the property. St. Michaels was an orphanage. It could have been developed with more than 1,500 housing units, but we negotiated to buy the property. It was an \$11 million acquisition. We raised \$8 million from public funds, and for the rest we went out to the community. They came out in droves to support the project, and the \$3 million was raised in a matter of months. The project has taken about a year. We will own and manage the land. Some of the property will be used for farming, some for community gardens, some for public access and walking trails. That was a great one.

Q: How do you decide what projects to pursue?

A: When you start a land trust like this, you preserve what comes your way. Now, we have developed a series of maps that create the long-range plans for areas of acquisition. There are a number of important stream corridors that lead to the Delaware River. The next step was to figure out a set of standards within those corridors to evaluate the individual properties. We have a full range of criteria that is evaluated before there is authorization to acquire property. Our goal is to create and preserve very critical, environmentally sensitive areas that involve water, habitats and old growth forests, which is balanced with a need to preserve areas of public access. Another component of our work is farmland preservation.

Q: How did you get interested in open space preservation?

A: I've always personally had a strong interest in nature and the land and habitat and animals. I like to walk in the woods and learn things about it. I am one who feeds the birds and spent a lot of time outside with my kids. The nice thing about joining the land trust was being able to combine my interest with the ability to use my legal training as a volunteer.

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