



SUGARLOAF CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER January 2010

"Protecting our rural legacy"

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The Benefit Performance Ruse

When the AgReserve was established the basic idea was to safeguard traditional agricultural land from the urban sprawl. The AgReserve has become a successful reality enabling not only farmers to protect and enhance their production but also attracting visitors from urban areas seeking to enjoy the special natural beauty of this part of Montgomery County. Unfortunately, in recent times the AgReserve has also become a magnet for associations and enterprises seeking to improve their financial net worth by requesting permits to hold soccer games, polo matches, and other large events under the guise of benefit performances.

In Montgomery County as elsewhere, certain non-profit benefit events are seen as a matter of right, for example, an outdoor church bazaar, and the county permit is readily available because of the transparency of the event. However, the number of benefit performance permits issued in recent years has risen rapidly not because of an increased number of small non-profit benefit events but because of growing competition by large associations for use of inexpensive rural land for what they call benefit performances. In part because of less than efficient enforcement of the existing restrictions for activities allowed in the AgReserve these large events have taxed the capacity of rural roads, created roadblocks for farm machinery, brought noise and light pollution, and have contributed to making rural land more expensive.

For its January meeting the Sugarloaf Board invited Council members **Phil Andrews** and **Marc Elrich** to hear our concerns and to discuss present trends in the issuance of benefit performance permits. SCA along with other civic organizations are emphasizing transparent procedures and effective enforcement of existing restrictions for use of land for non-profit events in the AgReserve. The meeting provided hope that our concerns were understood and that close cooperation between the area's civic associations and County officials may result in permitting policies and their enforcement which will benefit bona fide non-profits as well as resident farmers and all visitors to the area.

Special Notice!

The second annual Sugarloaf Seed and Plant Swap at Linden Farm will take place May 8. When you start seeds in a few weeks plant extras to swap with gardening neighbors.

Think Spring!