

Culbertson Mill

We are so happy to be able to preserve this beautiful land, a part of God's bounty. It will always remain natural- trees, river, fields, and forest. Funding from the South Carolina Conservation Bank helped make this possible.

Dianne Culbertson



FOCUS



Photo by Judith Brown

LIFE ON THE REEDY — A partial rock wall built by Mitchell Pressley in the 1940s helped channel some of the Reedy River straight toward his grist mill, which was used for decades to grind corn and grains from nearby farmers. The original mill was built by members of the Culbertson family in the 1800s. Now because of a conservation easement, the land is in a conservation land trust and will remain undeveloped. The owner since 2014, Dianne Culbertson relied on help from Upstate Forever to get 108 acres preserved for the future.

Conservation easement celebrated

Culbertsons preserve life on the Reedy for future generations

By Judith Brown
Staff Writer

There's always truth in the proverbial saying that nothing is permanent, but thanks to a land trust agreement and a conservation easement, a parcel of property on the Reedy River at Ekum Beach Road will remain pristine, thanks to the work of a Gray Court and Owings area family.

When Dianne Culbertson learned in August 2014 that the A. Mitchell Pressley estate would be auctioned off, she and her son Chad knew they needed to try and purchase at least some of the property. From 1785 when Revolutionary War soldier Robert Culbertson purchased land in what is now the Hood Road and Ekum community until the 1930s, Culbertsons lived there. Culbertson Mill was already a working mill by 1870, and the Reedy River was an integral part of the extended family.

It was land that was highly appreciated by Dianne's husband, Charles, who passed away in 2005, and her son, Chad, who also has a farm in the Gray Court area and appreciates the family land and history.

"Almost every time he'd go to Greenwood he'd stop by and ask Mr. Pressley if he was ready to sell it yet," Dianne said, laughing at the memory of Charles' desire to reclaim the property.

When Pressley passed away, though, his children were all living elsewhere and the property was divided into 10 tracts for sale by auction. Throughout that morning of the Aug. 9, 2014, auction, Culbertson eventually was able to purchase the entire acreage, which ended up being 111 acres of Reedy River, road frontage and the hillsides far above the river on the opposite side of Ekum Beach Road. The property includes a home built by Pressley and the tenant who has lived there several years now helps maintain the property near the old water-powered grist mill and the small cabin which Pressley and his wife used as a cafe of sorts for the swimmers who came to the sandy bank to swim every summer — the reason "Beach" was added to the Ekum name there.

As far as Culbertson knows, it's the only water-powered grist mill still in existence in Laurens County, and she hopes eventually to bring in people who could restore it, similar to the restored Hagood Mill in Pickens County.

The mill and the unblemished property are primary reasons that Culbertson wanted to see the property saved.

"Charles used to say you can't preserve it if you don't own it," Culbertson said. "This is the only one still left that I know of. I wanted to save the mill but I especially wanted to preserve the property."

She and Chad have already put "Little Knob" area of Gray Court property into a conservation easement, and now that she's a board member of the non-profit Upstate Forever agency, she went to the Land Trust experts there for help again. Working through the lengthy application process and approval by the S.C. Conservation Bank committee wasn't quick or easy but was well worth it.

"It's a great way for family farmers to be able to keep their farms because once the land is established as a conservation easement, it's legally binding and it follows the land even if someone else buys it," Culbertson said. "It's helped people

save their family farms because it lowers the taxes some so you can afford to keep your land."

Upstate Forever held a celebration earlier this month to honor the Culbertson family for their efforts to preserve some of the beautiful natural places in Laurens County.

"Development is important, but in the right places," Culbertson said. "I love the country and I want to make sure we keep some of it for people to enjoy."

For anyone interested in obtaining more information about conservation easements or land bank property, contact Upstate Forever at www.upstateforever.org or call 864-250-0500.



Photo by Upstate Forever

COMMITTED TO THE LAND — Dianne Culbertson and her son, Chad, fulfilled a family dream recently when they were able to purchase over 100 acres on the Reedy River at Ekum Beach Road and guarantee its protection through a conservation easement which protects the land from development even if it were to be sold.



Photo by Judith Brown

STROLL NEAR THE "BEACH" — Dianne Culbertson walks up past the old mill which ground the grain and corn for many farmers. It's across from the sandy beach of the Reedy River which provided swimming space for generations of Laurens County residents, and the source of the "Beach" in the community's name.

Photos by Judith Brown
IDLE ARTIFACTS — Below and at right, still present are the old wooden wheels and gears which were used to work the old mill well into the 1960s. Now that it's on property that will be preserved, owner Dianne Culbertson and her son Chad, also from Gray Court, hope to get the mill working again.

