

# Chancellorsville Owner Asks \$40M

By Deborah Fitts

CHANCELLORSVILLE, Va.

— A coalition of preservationists successfully beat back a proposal to rezone an 800-acre farm at Chancellorsville for massive development, but attempts to buy the tract have so far fallen on deaf ears.

"Negotiations are at a stalemate," admitted Jim Campi, spokesman for the Civil War Preservation Trust. Campi said the Trust has met with John Mullins, owner of the farm adjacent to Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park.

Mullins "offered to sell the entire property to us," but there was a hitch: he asked for \$40 million, Campi said, seven times the property's \$5.6 million assessed value.

Mullins, a funeral-home owner, purchased the land in 1995 for \$2.2 million.

"We've also learned that he's negotiating with developers," Campi said. "So out of spite he's raising the bar higher for preservation groups than for those who want to develop the property."

Mullins has said that the property will now be developed according to its existing zoning, which allows 225 houses plus offices and stores on 55 acres.

Campi said, however, that the

coalition is by no means helpless. Quite frankly, this is just the beginning," he said. "First of all it's going to be very hard for him to find a developer who's willing to go through what we just put Dogwood through."

Campi spearheaded the coalition in a relentless offensive to block Dogwood Development Co.'s proposal to rezone the Mullins tract for nearly 2000 homes and over 2 million square feet of commercial space.

After the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors rejected the rezoning March 26, Dogwood dropped its option on the property. Campi said the coalition is "also working with the Army Corps of Engineers to make sure the wetlands on this site are properly mitigated. We've learned that because this site has got such national attention, the Army Corps is going to be very thorough.

"It's going to take a lot of time, and we have all the time in the world — and Mr. Mullins doesn't."

Campi pointed out that the coalition receives its legal support at Chancellorsville free of charge. The Washington law firm of Hogan & Hartson has donated more than

\$100,000 in legal services to the Trust this year alone.

"Our offer continues to be that we're interested in purchasing for fair market value," Campi said — about \$5000 to \$7000 an acre, or \$4 million to \$5.6 million. The coalition is focused on protecting about 350 acres of the farm, and "working with the county" to develop the rest in a sensitive manner.

"In an ideal world we'd protect the whole property," Campi explained. "But other parcels at Chancellorsville are threatened as well, and the best use of funds is to protect 350 acres and use the rest of the money to preserve other sites associated with Chancellorsville."

Mullins offered to donate some battlefield land to the county, but did not say how much. Campi dismissed the offer, saying "We don't want a handout."

The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT), a coalition member, approached Mullins earlier to discuss a purchase. Mullins accused them of failing to respond to his offer, however.

"That's not true," said CVBT President Mike Stevens. "We never got back to him because we never got an offer."