

Helene Shue keeps her home after all

Friday, November 14, 2003

BY MARY KLAUS
Of The Patriot-News

Helene Shue has lived on her 41-acre farm near Hershey for 50 years, and it is where she wants to spend her remaining days. Last night, the 89-year-old widow learned that she will get her wish.

Shue's land and home in South Hanover Twp. was sold at a tax sale in September because of \$572 in unpaid taxes from 2001. She had paid her taxes in full every other year, including this year.

Philip Dobson of Middle Paxton Twp. paid \$15,000 for the land on Route 39. But he met yesterday with Shue's nephew, John Arndt, and agreed to give back the land. The county has agreed to reimburse Dobson.

Arndt was so delighted that he invited Dobson to visit Shue. They went to Shue's home together to tell her that she was getting her land and house back.

"Oh, my God, I can't believe it," Shue said, hugging Dobson and her nephew. "I won't forget this day."

The sale of Shue's property drew national attention following a story in The Patriot-News last Friday.

For the past five decades, Shue has lived on the farm, overseeing the apple, cherry and peach orchards, raising pigs and naming them after family members and later raising beef cattle, her nephew said.

The land meant so much to her that the former registered nurse previously declined to sell her land for \$1 million, Arndt said.

Officials from the county's tax bureau said they made repeated attempts to collect the unpaid 2001 taxes. County officials said they made proper notification -- even posting notices on her door -- before putting the property on the auction block.

When Arndt learned that his aunt's property had been sold, he filed a petition with Dauphin County Court to stop it.

County officials, including Robert Burns, the county's chief of staff, worked to set up a meeting between Arndt and Dobson.

Dobson, who owns car washes and buys and sells properties, said he "had no idea when I bought it that there was an 89-year-old widow living there. I found that out when I was reading the newspaper."

In explaining his decision to give back the land, Dobson said: "It was a no-brainer, a moral issue, not a legal one. The property should be returned to her."

Dobson said returning the land was the only thing to do, adding "I got something better than a million-dollar property. I got a hug from a little old lady. That was worth more than anyone could imagine."

Arndt, of Susquehanna Twp., said he was "overwhelmed."

"Mr. Dobson is a fine, upstanding person," Arndt said, putting an arm around Dobson's shoulders. "When the land was sold, my aunt said, 'This could kill me.' Now, she has it back."

Arndt and Dobson called for improvements in the Pennsylvania Real Estate Tax Sale law.

"The Dauphin County Tax Claim Bureau does its best to follow requirements of the law," said Anthony McBeth, Arndt's attorney.

"But the law itself needs to allow better screening of potential delinquent taxes so that people like Mrs. Shue, who has paid every real estate tax before and since 2001, do not have all they worked for exposed to a sale."

McBeth called for "a greater level of notice of sale to people with nearly perfect tax payment records like Mrs. Shue."

Arndt said his aunt plans to pay the \$572 tax bill today.

"This had a happy ending," he said. "I plan to help her more with her mail and bills after this so nothing falls between the cracks."

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