

Gambrills landowner honored for preservation

Hall property is first of bay 'pearls'

By PAMELA WOOD, Staff Writer

Ned Hall didn't see why all the fuss was necessary.

There were several government citations, heartfelt speeches and dozens of admirers offering a standing ovation - all to honor Hall's choice to preserve his tract of woodland in west county.

For Hall, it wasn't a difficult choice or one to be celebrated. Protecting land from development is just the natural thing to do, he said.

"It's too much, too much," Hall said yesterday after he became the first honoree in the Chesapeake Bay String of Pearls Project, which aims to highlight property owners who protect their land.

Hall and his wife, Alice, own 70 hilly acres in Gambrills near Staples Corner. It's heavily forested and sits in the headwaters of the South River watershed.

"It's just like any other woods, but it's protected," Hall said.

About 15 years ago, the Halls decided to prevent the forest from ever being turned into a housing subdivision or strip mall. They put the land under a conservation easement, which is a legal document that prohibits development on a property, even if it is sold or otherwise changes hands.

Hall, a retired surveyor who lives "in town" in Annapolis with his wife, said preserving the land was an easy decision to make.

"That's the way I grew up," he said.

But preserving land can be a difficult choice, said state Sen. Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, who was one of several speakers who praised the Halls during a ceremony at the County Courthouse in downtown Annapolis.

"We as government officials like to take credit ... but the fact is, it takes a willing property owner to defer economic gain, to be long-sighted instead of short-sighted," said Reilly, who recently resigned from the County Council to fill the seat of just-retired state Sen. Janet Greenip, R-Crofton. Greenip offered a Senate resolution to the Halls, one of her last acts in office.

County Executive John R. Leopold also spoke on the theme of individual actions being important in the ongoing struggle to help the Chesapeake Bay. He said individuals aren't recognized often enough.

"We appreciate what you did and we appreciate all the others who have preserved land," he said.

Chesapeake Bay String of Pearls Project founder Dick Lahn said he hopes to increase the public appreciation for landowners through his program.

A federal retiree from Crofton, Lahn launched his organization 2002, but he had difficulties in getting all the pieces in place. He now has a new board of directors and a laser focus on celebrating people who preserve land.

Lahn said he intends to work with land trusts and conservation groups to identify potential honorees. He's starting in Maryland, but said he intends to honor landowners throughout the six-state Chesapeake Bay watershed.

"Pearls everywhere in the watershed is the mission of this project," Lahn said.