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outdoor research, but they retain what they learn better.”

Pettit Preserve board member Helen Taylor described her late friend as an inspiring, positive person, who was not afraid of hard work and welcomed opportunities to grow.

“She was determined to speak truth,” Taylor said. “She was absolutely the most optimistic person I’ve ever known other than my father. You know how people say ... ‘Everything is not how it used to be.’ She never, ever had that in her vocabulary. Hers was one of what can I do to help make this world better, and not only did she talk about it she did something about it.”

On Saturday, graveside services will be held at 2:30 p.m. at the Pettit Family Cemetery. Visitation will be at Owen Funeral Home, 12 Collins Drive in Cartersville, Saturday from 12 to 2 p.m.

In honor of Dellinger’s memory, her family is welcoming contributions to The Margaret and Luke Pettit Environmental Preserve at P.O. Box 2843,

Cartersville, GA 30120.

The Pettit Preserve founder leaves educational legacy

By MARIE NESMITH
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Cartersville resident and preservationist Gay Pettit Dellinger died Wednesday at the age of 77, leaving behind an inspiring, educational legacy for future generations. Among her many passions was The Margaret and Luke Pettit Environmental Preserve, a nonprofit she created and named in honor of her parents.

“As a person she is irreplaceable — the generosity, the wisdom and the caring,” said Missy Phillips, executive director for The Pettit Preserve. “She cared for everyone, including the community, and wanted to do so much and leave a legacy and bless her heart

I think she has. She [wanted] The Preserve to serve the community.

“It’s such an unselfish act ... to have put this [land] in conservation for preservation and education so that children, students and schools would have a place to go and actually reconnect.”

Situated off Highway 61 in southwest Bartow County, The Pettit Preserve features three trails totaling less than 2 miles in length, a swinging bridge, a 9-acre lake and an amphitheater. The 70-acre forest and lake ecosystem was formed as a private, nonprofit corporation in 1999 when Dellinger and her children donated 60 acres of property to the endeavor.

By appointment only, The Pettit Preserve presents educational programs during the school year to stu-

dents, ranging from pre-school to college. Activities, such as tree identification and water testing, are tailored to the students’ ages and learning needs. In 2008, 832 third- through sixth-graders and 239 adults visited the site.

On Oct. 17, The Preserve’s amphitheater that is known as Boardroom for Planet Earth was dedicated to Dellinger, who considered the stone structure and its surroundings one of the site’s focal points.

“I think it is the heart of the whole property,” Dellinger said about the amphitheater prior to its dedication. “I have always thought that since the beginning, [when] we used it a lot as a family gathering place because of the source of the water.

“I was overwhelmed,” she said, referring to the

dedication. “I said, ‘I just as soon you not do that’ and one of the board members said, ‘Well, it has already been voted on, and remember you have only one vote and you got outvoted.’”

Since turning the property into a nonprofit, Dellinger said The Pettit Preserve took on a life of its own.

“Some things I wouldn’t have dreamed of have happened, some things have gone as planned, but we’ve sort of been open for it to tell us which way it needs to go ... The mission statement says its purpose is for research and education,” she said. “We believe strongly that education in the out of doors about the out of doors is extremely valuable. I think research shows that people not only learn better with hands-on