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For Immediate Release

Two Generous Landowners Ensure Local Open Space Benefits

February 2, 2010 – *Limerick and Douglass Townships* An agricultural gem thrives in burgeoning Limerick Township. Thanks to the foresight of **Donald Hawthorne, Jr.**, who with his brother-in-law **G. Newton Reitnour III** generously donated a conservation easement on 28 actively farmed acres, this gem will continue to thrive. The land off Neiffer Road has been in the Hawthorne family for 95 years, with Don's father planting the first Scotch pine seedlings on the property's eastern border in 1946. Little did Don's father know that these early seedlings would sprout the future for the farm off Neiffer Rd., now loved by the community and known for its affordable u-cut Christmas trees, u-pick blueberries, tomatoes, and cider. In 1971 Don gathered seeds from the cones of these Scotch pines and sprouted them into seedlings that he planted two years later and nurtured into the first Christmas trees sold in 1978. Don began growing and selling trees on a small scale while he continued working as a teacher of Business Education. After 32 years of teaching, he retired -- only to find he is busier than ever. The Douglas firs and Scotch pines he cultivates cover much of the property. Fruit trees, hardwoods, and grassy areas add to the farm's diverse landscape. A compact, but productive blueberry patch boasting eleven varieties of blueberries produce the sought-after fruit from late June through part of August. Don says pickers arrive with flashlight-equipped helmets at five o'clock a.m. to strip the bushes of their ripe berries each Saturday. Development surrounds the land owned by Don and brother-in-law Newton, and developers have regularly made offers. Then why did the two decide to donate a conservation easement? With a twinkle in his eye and a sneaky grin, Don said he wanted "to be a rascal." Having spent a good part of his life working and nurturing the land, he also wanted to keep it

green forever. Don understates his gift, but it must not hurt to know that the fruits of his labor – the delicious local cider, the sweet blueberries, and the attractively priced u-cut firs and pines are so valued by the community.

North of Pottstown, in Douglass Township, another local landowner recently made a similar donation of development rights on land long-held by her family. **Dr. Deborah Patt**, a local veterinarian with a flourishing practice and 39 nearby acres of land in Douglass Township, attended a meeting hosted by Montgomery County Lands Trust at the beginning of 2009. It was then that the wheels began to turn. Dr. Patt learned that parcels such as hers are important to the health of watersheds and that they can serve as a valuable puzzle pieces interlocking with contiguous, conserved blocks of land. The prospect of being able to permanently ensure the safekeeping of her land held strong appeal, and she began working with Montgomery County Lands Trust on a conservation agreement. Situated on the western edge of Montgomery County overlooking the dramatic landscape of Berks County, Dr. Patt's 39 acres include a mix of meadow and maturing forest traversed by a rustic dirt road and stream that feeds into Middle Creek, a tributary of Swamp Creek – a special focus area for Montgomery County Lands Trust. Across the main road to the south lies a generous swath of open space created by a 94-acre farm preserved through Montgomery County's farmland preservation program.

Dr. Patt believes strongly in preserving open space and regrets seeing so much beautiful land developed. She understands there should be a place for people, but feels it is important to protect our best landscapes. Regarding the land entrusted to her, she has always loved it and wants to see it keep its special natural and farm features. She notes that her parents who passed away in 2006 would have been pleased with this outcome, and it gives her peace of mind knowing that even with future owners the land will remain undeveloped. Montgomery County Lands Trust applauds Dr. Deborah Patt and Donald Hawthorne with brother-in-law Newton Reitnour for generously donating their conservation easements and for ensuring that two special Montgomery County landscapes will forever retain their natural beauty.

As a non-profit conservancy, Montgomery County Lands Trust works to preserve and connect the natural areas, farmland, and neighborhood green spaces which contribute to our quality of life, to a clean and abundant water supply, and to the health of our region's economy. To learn more about our organization, please visit our website at www.mclt.org

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