

A priceless gift of open land

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Like so many longtime Santa Feans, Jane and Gene Petchesky watched a small capital city grow suburbs and spread businesses subdivisions across what once were wide-open spaces. Their move farther south of town in the late 1960s to a 262-acre ranch was one way to find elbow room as shopping malls made their appearance.

A merchant with a store on the Plaza, Petchesky was a horseman — so dedicated that he helped create el Rodeo de Santa Fe. After Gene died in 2001, Jane remained on the ranch — and active in community and philanthropic affairs. Their son, Steve, passed away in 2005.

Would their ranch go the way of so many other spreads surrounding Santa Fe?

Decidedly not. Jane Petchesky, herself a first-rate horsewoman, worked with the Santa Fe Community Foundation to determine which of many conservation organizations would best serve as steward over nearly half a square mile of relatively rustic tranquility.

She chose the New Mexico Land Conservancy, a relatively new organization led by several longtime land hands from around the state. Its chairman is Jack Wright, head of the geography department at New Mexico State University, and its board includes Santa Fe real-estate expert Moo Thorpe and former state land commissioner Ray Powell. As a result of its efforts, 70,000 acres of open land have been set aside statewide.

In mid-June, the conservancy will formally open its headquarters where the Petcheskys lived so much of their lives. She's moving to El Castillo retirement center in mid-Santa Fe — a marked change in lifestyle for the 87-year-old, but having her in the thick of things could be our community's gain.

As for that gift of her home and the space around it, it will prove a priceless bulwark against development, as well as a center for the study and promotion of conservation. Generosity like hers, and that of others who've made fee-simple and conservation-easement contributions, will go a long way toward preserving the beauty of our region — which, ironically, has attracted so many to our part of New Mexico.

Many generations of Santa Feans will have cause to thank Jane Petchesky.