

LETTER TO PHIL GARBER, EDITOR, OBSERVER-TRIBUNE at pgarber@newjerseyhills.com

EDITOR:

## PITNEY FARM IS A COMMUNITY TREASURE

Back in 1999, a property with a deteriorating farmhouse and barns was purchased by Bernards Township. Some people wanted to tear it down. Others wanted to restore it. Today, the eighteenth century farmstead, which is listed on the Federal and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places, is a vibrant arts center known as "Farmstead Arts" and serves as a model for adaptive reuse of an historic treasure. Farmstead Arts is a center for fine, performing and practical arts in Basking Ridge, NJ located on the grounds of the historic Kennedy Martin Stelle Farmstead.

I lived in Mendham Township for three years, so I have been following the fate of Pitney Farm with great interest. Now I live in Bernardsville, not all that far from the Farmstead Arts Center. Frankly, I think Pitney Farm, with its nationally-recognized gardens and landscaping, is at the dawn of its restoration with arguably more potential and significance than the Kennedy Martin Stelle (KMS) Farmstead.

Please note that since its opening, the KMS farm house has been in constant use as an arts center. The 5 upstairs studios are licensed to artists and the main floor is used as art galleries, teaching studios and for small concerts and theatrical events. The stately Colonial/Federalist/Victorian family homestead for 11 generations of the Pitney family, can serve all of these needs. What is even more upsetting is the failure to recognize the importance of this one simple fact (11 generations of one family) that is a keystone principal of significance to the National Trust's interests much less the interests of our county's heritage.

A strategically important example easily found in our neighboring community, the restored KMS English Barn is used for art exhibits, workshops, lectures and classes; theatrical and musical performances – and barn dancing! The Big Barn at Pitney Farm could serve all these community needs, and perhaps become the permanent home of the town's theatrical group.

The transformation of the KMS Farmstead Arts center property—from a farm that was worked for over 250 years to a center for the fine, performing and practical arts—represents an on-going collaborative effort between the Friends of the KMS Farmstead; local, state and county government; hundreds of citizen volunteers (There is already 100's stepping up for Pitney); and some of New Jersey's most respected preservation professionals. Mendham can follow the KMS model and turn Pitney Farm into a cultural and educational center that will bring value and pride to the community, much less our country.

In 1999, when the KMS Farmstead was acquired by Bernards Township, the Farm House, as well as the Barn and other historically significant buildings were in genuine need of repair and restoration to provide stabilization and prevent collapse. Under the guidance of historic architects and other New Jersey preservation professionals, the Farmstead is being restored.

Who is/can be paying for it? Reviewing the KMS website, <http://farmsteadartscenter.org/>, lists more than \$8,399,334 from a variety of public and private grant funding sources. Additional funding was raised for the general operations of the Friends of Kennedy Martin Stelle, the nonprofit group that operates the Farmstead Arts Center. I understand that numerous matching grants, as well as, a local contingent of diverse donors, has already been easily identified for Pitney Farm. Tax drain impact can be genuinely ameliorated with these and similar efforts.

The Farmstead Arts Center (KMS) is a living demonstration to all of us, how an irreplaceable historic farmstead can be preserved, restored and turned into a cultural and educational center for the community, providing programming and services that citizens want and need. Pitney Farm can do that for Mendham. Save Pitney Farm for the Mendham's ([www.pitneyfarm.org](http://www.pitneyfarm.org).... Soon to be launched.)

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