

Lion share: Woman donates statue

Comey estate's icon now in Wenonah park

By Carly Q. Romalino
Courier-Post

Anything not bolted down at Diana Salamone's Wenonah estate was sold to the highest bidder Saturday.

More than 800 buyers left the East Mantua Avenue property after laying claim to an item from the century-old mansion, including the two-ton granite lion that protected its grounds for decades.

The estate was built by Robert Comey in 1901. Salamone, its most recent owner, sold it and an adjoining cottage for \$11 million. New owners from Princeton made settlement on the property Wednesday.

The lion — a borough icon — was pried from its pedestal Monday, lifted by crane into a truck and hauled away.

Jane Ramsay, a Wenonah native who purchased the statue for \$4,500, made sure it didn't go far. It's sitting in the "sunniest spot" in Wenonah Memorial Park, a half-mile from the estate.

It's a gift to the Wenonah Lions Club and the borough in memory of Ramsay's grandmother and mother, Frances Rode Tucker and Jane Tucker Ramsay, respectively.

"I'm just so glad it's staying in Wenonah — to give back to the town what it has given four generations of Ramsays," the donor said.

Ramsay's grandparents moved to Wenonah in the 1920s after stumbling on the borough Fourth of July parade. Several of her six siblings still live in town, where they're raising the youngest generation of the family.

The Independence Day festival — sponsored by the Wenonah Lions Club — is a century-old tradition, according to club President Sean Tully.



The Cornell family crane company moves the lion statue from the former Comey estate to Wenonah Memorial Park. JOHN R. DOMINY (JERSEYPHOTOSHUGBAG.COM)

"We still come back for the Fourth of July," said Ramsay, who now lives in Maryland.

Two other bidders edged up the lion's auction price: a Georgia man attempting to buy it for a client in Atlanta and the borough's own Happy Cornell McInnis, whose intentions mirrored Ramsay's.

After Ramsay won the bid, the Cornell family's crane company offered to lift it off the property.

Crane operators used handmade levers to shimmy the lion loose from its base, then carefully slid boards under the sculpture to lift it onto a truck for the trip to the park.

The lion's location depends ultimately on council approval.

"For a lot of folks of my age, it's just iconic," said Councilman John Dominy. "It would have been

nice if it stayed at the house. If it's not going to be able to stay at the house, it's nice it's with the borough."

It's unclear how long the lion has been on the property. Ramsay is researching its history.

The Lions Club accept-

ed the donation and will likely assume responsibility for the statue if council votes to keep it at the borough-owned park.

"It was a very generous thing," Tully enthused. "Council is going to approve it. They love it."

He sees the granite lion as a future cornerstone of the park.

Once its location is settled, the club will build a pedestal.

"We want kids to climb it. We want people to take pictures with it," Ramsay said.

Already, she's spotted borough teens taking "selfies" with the statue.

"We want teenagers to have their first kiss at the lion."

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