

Green Family Offers Free Campus to Christian Institutions

A school campus founded by famed evangelist D.L. Moody is up for grabs in the small town of Northfield, Mass.—with one important catch.

A billionaire family from Oklahoma has pledged to give away the 217-acre campus to a suitor who commits to provide an education based on traditional Christian beliefs and proves to have enough money to maintain the property.

The campus was founded as a girls' school in 1879, and is reportedly worth \$20 million. It edges the Connecticut River Valley to the east, and offers views into neighboring New Hampshire and Vermont.

Once home to the Northfield Mount Hermon prep school, the property was sold after it consolidated at another nearby campus. The Green family—owner of the Oklahoma-based craft store Hobby Lobby—purchased the property for \$100,000 in 2009.

The Greens originally intended to give the campus to a new college named after C.S. Lewis, but the project stalled in December amid fundraising issues. Now, after \$5 million worth of renovations, the campus is move-in ready.

"It's spectacular. It's spectacular. That's all I can say," Tracy Davis, academic dean of California-based Olivet University, told the Associated Press as she walked the grounds.

The Greens initially invited 15 top Christian institutions to take a look, and 11 have visited. According to Jerry Pattengale, a college administrator the Greens hired to help

them find a new owner, about nine others have been allowed to inspect the grounds as news of the offer has spread, and more requests come in daily. Olivet and Azusa Pacific University in California and Liberty University in Virginia are among the schools whose names have gone public.

Hobby Lobby President Steve Green said he'd like to transfer the grounds to its new owners by the end of the year, but the priority is finding the right tenant. He spoke to AP of "restoring Moody's original intent to create a place to teach and train people to share Biblical truth." Busloads of Christians from South Korea—where Moody's ministry had a great impact—still come to Northfield to join hands and pray at his hilltop grave.

"We would love to see the property be used for a great Christian ministry, and if we help somebody to get that started without a lot of heartburn ... and be a light in the area, that would be our primary goal," Green said.

Many locals are ready to welcome the new tenant of the campus, but some are concerned about how well a conservative Christian institution will fit in the town of 3,000 in a typically liberal state.

Some Northfield Mount Hermon alumni petitioned the school's board of trustees to protest any sale to Liberty University when it showed interest, but the preparatory school has no say over what the Greens do with the property.

Liberty is reportedly not a top contender anyway. The Greens want to give the campus to someone who will take all of it, but Liberty has talked about taking control of only a portion.

Green said such protests would matter "very little" if the family felt it had found a good tenant who would also be a good neighbor. "You'll never please everybody and we understand that," he said.

Corinne Allen, a local restaurant owner, told AP many are pleased a Christian institution is coming and want to make things work.

“I do believe the town loves the campus; nobody wants to see it go to waste,” she said. “In the end, the campus is the town, and it always has been.”