

Nonprofit offers \$10,000 to help save Ghirardi oak

By CHRISTOPHER SMITH
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The Daily News

LEAGUE CITY

After months of debate over the fate of the Ghirardi oak, a Houston nonprofit is offering to help raise the money to move the historic oak. It's also offering to donate \$10,000 of its own cash.

And to help find a new home for the tree, Clarence Ghirardi, a member of the family for which the tree is named, has offered to donate a piece of his property a quarter of a mile down Louisiana Avenue from where the tree stands.

Barry Ward, executive director of Trees for Houston, said the nonprofit has no dog in the political fight over what to do with the oak.

The tree, a rare hybrid of live oak and overcup oak called a Compton oak, sits at FM 518 and Louisiana Avenue. Work to widen Louisiana has begun, but before the project can be completed, the city must decide what to do with the tree.

Moving the tree to the proposed Water Smart Park on Louisiana Avenue could cost almost \$300,000. Moving the road and creating a pocket park around the tree could cost \$360,000 to \$735,000. The third option is to cut the tree down.

"We feel it's up to both the representatives and



Michael Ghirardi talks about the history of the Ghirardi Oak as his sons Eric and Drayce walk beneath the tree with his father, Clarence Ghirardi, in League City on Wednesday afternoon. KEVIN M. COX/The Daily News

constituents in League City to make those decisions," Ward said. "That being said, it is an important tree, and our job is trees. If they decide they want to save it, we will do what we can."

And what the nonprofit can do is donate \$10,000 of its own money as well as bring its technical and fundraising expertise to the project, he said.

A significant portion of the money can be raised in six to eight months, Ward said.

"If everybody pitches in and cooperates and

thinks about what we can do, the likelihood is you will save one of the most significant Compton oaks in North America," Ward said.

"The question now is: Does the city council have the will to go ahead and make it happen?"

Clarence Ghirardi, 75, said he has lived his entire life in his League City home. His property is next to the city's proposed Water Smart Park. He said he is willing to donate a half acre to the park.

Clarence Ghirardi said he remembers when the

nobody will ever know it was here."

In September, the city council voted to move the road and create a park around the tree.

But Mayor Tim Paulissen said there is not much talk of creating the pocket park now.

This new proposal by the Ghirardis and Trees for Houston must be brought to the city council soon, Paulissen said.

"The tree issue, one way or the other, will be on the agenda at the next meeting," he said. "We are kind of up against the wall, somewhat, because of the construction of the road."

Councilwoman Joann Dawson said the plan would still need the public's support.

"Trees of Houston doesn't want to get in the middle of political battle," she said. "The whole community has to get behind it."

Citing the people who have been emailing council members, Dawson said there is a strong nucleus of supporters.

"If councilmen who had reservations about the money — if they realize that Trees of Houston can really contribute to the project, I think they'll get on board and be positive about the results," she said. "It looks like a win-win for everybody."

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Draft Phase I Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment

PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustee Council

The Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Trustees want to hear from you! A draft plan of proposed early restoration projects is available for public review and comment. The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Draft Phase I Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment describes eight projects, two in each of these states: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi. The projects are intended to benefit injured marshes, coastal dune and nearshore habitats, oysters, and human uses (on water recreation).

The trustees will conduct one public meeting in Texas where you can learn more about the draft restoration plan and comment on it.

TEXAS PUBLIC MEETING

Jan. 26, 2012 6:00 - 7:00 PM Open House Meeting
7:00 - 9:00 PM

Texas A&M University
Ocean & Coastal Studies Building #3029
on Pelican Island off Seawolf Park Blvd
Galveston, TX 77553

To learn more about Early Restoration, review and comment on the draft plan, visit www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov or http://www.tpubd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/enviroconcerns/damage_assessment/deep_water_horizon_dphnrl. For more information about the Texas public meeting or NRDA process, please contact TADMVHNRDA@tpwd.state.tx.us or Nanciam Regalado, Dept. of the Interior, 678.296.6805.