

Friars may sign deal for water bottling plant at Padua

By KELLEY QUINN
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WATKINS GLEN — A deal is in the works between a local business and the Franciscan Friars to establish a spring water bottling plant on the St. Anthony's of Padua property, the caretaker said Wednesday.

A contract has been drawn up and needs approval from the Order of Franciscan Fathers, owner of the 283 acres on the west hill above Watkins Glen.

"A contract has been written and just needs the approval by our (Franciscan) counselors," said the

Rev. Austin J. Budnick, the caretaker. "That could happen in a month or two."

Budnick declined to name the buyer, but said several people are involved.

"They'd lease or buy the surface land," Budnick said. "We'd retain the sub-surface values, like the water and gravel."

Dominick Franzese, the Watkins Glen-based Realtor who is trying to sell the property, was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

Although Watkins Glen Mayor Bob Lee said he doesn't know any details of the pending sale, he

agreed that the land is full of possibilities.

"Getting that building (the former Glen Springs Resort) out of there just adds to the property," Lee said. "Its deterioration has been one of the biggest stumbling blocks in selling the property."

The Order of Franciscan Fathers bought the former Glen Springs in 1949 and converted it into the St. Anthony's of Padua High School — a preparatory school for boys entering college or the priesthood.

With the resort's purchase, the Franciscans also obtained rights to the property's sprawling land.

The school closed in 1970, and the order has since tried to sell the property.

The closest deal fell through in 1995 when developer Norman Kelly, of Hamburg, N.Y., failed to make the second installment of a down-payment. Kelly wanted to renovate the resort and build a spring water plant and conference center.

In November, Kelly said he still wanted to buy the land. But Kelly's \$50,000 down payment was forfeited to the Franciscans when he didn't come up with the rest of the money, Franzese said in November.

Even though the deal failed, Kelly



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REV. AUSTIN J. BUDNICK:

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brought attention to the land.

"He saw that the spring water was really important. He knew that (putting a spring water plant) wasn't just a pipe dream," Budnick said.

In 1992, Cornell University conducted a study on the Padua prop-

erty, Budnick said. The research revealed that the land holds three covered gorges — the size of three football fields — which would keep the water supply plentiful, he said.

The Order of Franciscan Fathers is asking \$4,000 an acre for the property, Budnick said.

The Franciscans aren't being stingy in wanting to hold onto the water and gravel rights to the land, even if they sell or lease the property. They have a vision.

For every gallon of spring water sold by the plant, the Franciscan order would receive 5 cents. The friars would use part of the money as a Franciscan global water fund, giving money to the poor around the world. Another portion of the money would be used locally, Budnick said.

"I can't say how, right now. But it has to do with education," he said.

Until a sale is completed, the Franciscans will continue developing their mission plan, such as the global water fund.

Budnick also hopes that razing the Glen Springs Resort will make the land a more viable prospect.

"There's a sentimental attachment to the building," he said. "It reminds us of the rich, powerful and famous people who used to come here."

"But there's a tremendous future here. There are great possibilities and only time will tell."