



Several members of the Poplar Neck Advisory Group brought information for the open house.

Tubman projects discussed

By **ABBY ANDREWS**
Staff Writer

DENTON — The first two of four public information sessions regarding planned projects to commemorate Harriet Tubman was held in Caroline County on Sept. 28.

The sessions, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, were held at the Gen. James F. Fretterd Community Center and were designed to educate the public about the projects and give people ideas about how they can become involved.

Two more sessions were held at Mace's Lane Middle School in Dorchester County on Sept. 29.

The four projects about which the public could learn are hoped to be complete by 2013, 100 years after Tubman died in Auburn, N.Y. Those projects include a Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park, which is in the design phase and will be located on 17 acres near the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Dorchester County; the 125-mile Maryland segment of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, which will pass through Dorchester and Caroline counties; a proposed national park honoring Tubman in both Maryland and New York; and coordination with the segment of the byway that will run from Sandtown, Del., to the Pennsylvania border in Wilmington, Del.

Kathy Mackel, director of the Caroline County Office of Tourism, said she was happy for the opportunity the public had to visit the open house.

"I'm just delighted we are making the locals aware of what's moving forward,"

Mackel said.

Amanda Fenstermaker, director of the Dorchester County Department of Tourism, said she hoped the visiting public would both learn about all the projects and see how federal, state and local officials are working together as one big effort to memorialize Tubman.

"In general, we're generating some positive buzz," said Fenstermaker.

While the state park will not be in Caroline County, there will be several stops on the scenic byway within the county. Among the stops are the Leverton home, which is now privately owned; Linchester Mill; Choptank Landing; Poplar Neck, where Tubman was a slave and later made many daring rescues; the Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Cemetery; the Webb Cabin on Grove Road; the courthouse green in Denton; the Tuckahoe Neck Meeting House, now privately owned; Red Bridges in Christian Park and Adkins Arboretum.

Mackel said her office is working with the National Park Service, Maryland Office of Tourism Development and the Poplar Neck Advisory Group, composed of Poplar Neck landowners and advocates, to develop a master plan outlining how Tubman's life will be commemorated in the 2,116-acre swath of land while maintaining quality of life for the landowners.

There are no plans to try to buy any of the land from current owners, Mackel said. Instead, the master plan is aimed at helping local landowners capitalize on the tourism that will be generated, by starting small businesses that add to the experi-

ence.

"They could offer guided tours, start a kayak business or a bed and breakfast," Mackel said. "We can build small businesses while telling the stories of Caroline County."

In addition, the master plan will also look into how to help visitors interpret Tubman's story at or near significant sites in the area, and how visitors will be able to use vehicles, bicycles, watercraft or their own two feet to access those sites.

Outside of Caroline County, work is moving along to have the state park up and running near Blackwater by 2013, said Matt Ritter, chief of interpretation for the Maryland Parks Service.

Ritter said the construction document for the building that will house exhibits on the property is nearly complete, though ground has not yet been broken for the building. The exhibits' design process is also nearly complete. The next step is to develop the construction document for the exhibits.

Several large boards on display showed what the building will look like and how exhibits might be laid out within it.

Anne Kyle, product development manager for the Maryland Office of Tourism, said the exhibits will share an overview of Tubman's life, her homeland and her efforts with the Underground Railroad.

Kyle said federal legislation has been introduced to establish the national parks in New York and Maryland, though she does not expect any movement on that legislation until at least after the general election in November.