



Central Virginia  
Battlefields Trust

### Mike Stevens - Heroes of Preservation

*In 2006, the Civil War Trust made history with its \$12 million purchase of the 208-acre Slaughter Pen Farm property in Virginia's Spotsylvania County — a portion of the Fredericksburg Battlefield whose name speaks to the intensity of the fighting that occurred there. This purchase was, and remains, the most expensive in the realm of nonprofit battlefield preservation to date. A key partner in the Old Dominion, the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust pledged to contribute \$1 million to save this hallowed ground.*

*In June 2012, CVBT President Mike Stevens will present the Civil War Trust with a check completing the group's generous contribution. We had the opportunity to discuss the occasion with Stevens earlier this year.*



*Dr. Mike Stevens (Rob Shenk)*

**Civil War Trust:** Civil War Trust President Jim Lighthizer has called the purchase of Slaughter Pen Farm "the most ambitious nonprofit battlefield acquisition effort in American history." What about this property in particular inspired you to join with the Trust in acquiring it?

**Mike Stevens:** The 208-acre Slaughter Pen Farm property was on [Central Virginia Battlefields Trust's](#) radar long before CVBT even existed. For years we as individuals would visit regularly with Mr. Pearson, the elderly farmer who owned the property. We did so because we recognized that this was hallowed ground in the truest sense of the word, the key to the 1862 [Battle of Fredericksburg](#), and almost certainly still the resting place today for many of the brave men who fought and fell there.

It is quite literally sacred soil, and to destroy such ground would be to dishonor their suffering and sacrifice, to dishonor their memory and their meaning. We of CVBT simply could not let that happen.

*Learn more about how you can help save the Slaughter Pen Farm at the Fredericksburg Battlefield: [Save the Slaughter Pen Farm Page](#)*

**Civil War Trust:** The purchase price of Slaughter Pen Farm was historical in its own right — \$12 million, towards which CVBT pledged to contribute \$1 million. How hard a pledge was this for you to fulfill? Was it worth it?

**Mike Stevens:** Our pledge of \$1 million was huge for a small organization like ours, but we felt that the property was that important and we wanted to send a clear message to the Civil War Trust's

Board of Directors that we stood firm in our commitment that this tract was simply too important to lose. Fundraising is always hard, of course, but when you're next in Fredericksburg, come to Slaughter Pen Farm, walk its ground, close your eyes and listen to what it has to say. Feel the sense of the numinous that pervades such a place. Know that, if you are open to it, the spirit of such a special place will touch your heart in ways that will change you forever. Words cannot express precisely what I mean by this, but all of us involved with CVBT affirm that this is so because we have experienced this truth firsthand. Was our \$1 million pledge worth it? Of course.

Civil War Trust: You recently worked with the Civil War Trust on the creation of the Chancellorsville Battle App as well. What do you think of the finished product? What impact do you anticipate this and similar apps will have on the future of heritage tourism?

Mike Stevens: The Chancellorsville Battle App is a wondrous thing to behold. I am a technologic illiterate, and even I have found it easy to use and extremely helpful in learning about the battle. Its potential benefit for heritage tourism is enormous, and we all owe a debt of gratitude to the Civil War Trust for embarking on such a wonderful effort.

*Download your own free copy of our Chancellorsville Battle App: [iPhone](#) / [Android](#)*

Civil War Trust: CVBT was active in Central Virginia long before the preservation of Slaughter Pen Farm — and the advent of the battle app. What are some of the group's other accomplishments of which you are most proud?

Mike Stevens: CVBT has saved over 1060 acres of hallowed ground on all four of our major local battlefields (check out our website for details, [www.cvbt.org](http://www.cvbt.org)), has remained focused on, and faithful to, our original mission of preserving threatened battlefield land, has established a reputation in the community and country for integrity and honesty, effectiveness and seriousness of purpose. We keep our promises. And, as important as anything else, we continue to prove ourselves worthy of those brave men in blue and gray whose suffering and sacrifice on these fields provide the reason why we do what we do. Success is not always possible, but remaining faithful to our cause is, and we of CVBT are committed to continuing the good fight until our Final Role is called.

Civil War Trust: Tell us a bit about your own past. Are you originally from Central Virginia? What brought you to the area — or influenced you to stay?

Mike Stevens: I was born and went through high school in New Jersey, went to Texas A & M University, Tulane Medical School, two years in the US Army Medical Corps, and have been in the private practice of dermatology with my wife Pat since 1976.

Civil War Trust: Who — or what — first inspired your interest in the Civil War? In battlefield preservation?

Mike Stevens: I became interested in the Civil War through watching the Ken Burns series, and I became passionate about battlefield preservation after spending a weekend at Gettysburg with Ed Bearss.

**Civil War Trust: What do you hope Americans take away from the ongoing commemoration of the Civil War sesquicentennial, both in Virginia and across the country?**

**Mike Stevens:** I hope that the sesquicentennial will allow Americans to know more about their history, to better appreciate that the past does matter, to understand that history is important, that our society today has grown out of the past, and that we as a country and as a people simply cannot know where we are or where we're going if we don't know where we've been. Just as a tree will die if its roots are cut, so too our country will be diminished if we as citizens allow ourselves to be cut off from the historical roots that define the American experience.

And as a battlefield preservationist, I hope that Americans will become more fully sensitive to the fact that a preserved battlefield is a uniquely wonderful and effective place for this learning experience to occur.