

[From Summer 2006]

Annual Meeting Banquet Held

In recognition of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge Volunteers, a volunteer banquet was held in honor of their accomplishments in 2005. Achieved milestones in volunteer hours, special and divisional awards, and naming the volunteer of the year were highlights.

Chincoteague Refuge Volunteers enjoy and experience the beauty of Assateague Island and want to do their part in helping to protect and conserve it. In 2005, volunteers gave 5,634 hours of their time, helping in every aspect of the refuge: visitor services, biology, maintenance, and even general administration. Volunteers staffed the visitor center, participated in wildlife surveys and constructed structures to serve both the wildlife and visitors. Volunteers' time and talents are measured by their achievements and goals attained. Volunteers also offer something immeasurable. They give from the heart - their enthusiasm, care and wonder is a gift to the refuge staff and visitors.

Chincoteague Natural History Association (CNHA) manages the wildlife tours which offer visitors a chance to see the northern end of the island. Here the public not only gets to see and experience more of the refuge, but through our volunteer interpreters learn about the history, habitats, and wildlife found on this refuge -and the importance of continuing to conserve not only this refuge but the entire refuge system. CNHA and the refuge staff honored wildlife tour interpreter Jean Bonde who consistently gives her time and shares her knowledge with visitors.

When the Assateague Lighthouse was transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2004, CNHA graciously took over managing the lighthouse and opened it to the public to offer a bird's eye view of Assateague Island! Volunteers serve as greeters both at the bottom and top of the lighthouse. Volunteer Wayne Bonde was honored for contributing the most hours working at the lighthouse. Wayne has such an interest and zest in presenting the history of the Assateague lighthouse and island.

The new volunteer of year award was bestowed upon Mike Messier. Mike volunteers three days a week at the visitor center, serves as a greeter at the Assateague lighthouse, and assisted at refuge celebrations. He stepped up to plate as the new editor for the Chincoteague Natural History Association Newsletter, the *Piping Plover*. He is brilliant with computers, resulting in the creation of a sign inventory database for the refuge.

The visitor center award went to Donald O' Loughlin, who throughout numerous years has been faithful in staffing the visitor center every Monday morning, rain or shine. Donald has provided excellent customer service to refuge visitors and has brought joy to the staff with his unique style of humor.

The biology division award went to Raymond Savage for his dedication in helping with piping plover management; conducting waterfowl surveys; participating in deer spotlight surveys; and posting signs to protect shorebirds' breeding grounds. Raymond's work will help conserve the wildlife found on Assateague Island for future generations to come.

The maintenance division award was presented to Carl Palmer. Carl has been a crew leader for the Service Elderhostel program for various projects. Carl took the lead in directing the Youth Conservation Corps enrollees in the construction of a gazebo. This gazebo, located by a maritime forest, will be used by school groups in providing environmental education. The Christmas float for 2005 was more than a float; it was a work of artistic craftsmanship. Carl created an exact replicate, down to details of individual roof shingles, of the old Assateague Schoolhouse. For the International Migratory Bird Celebration, Carl cut out wood pieces and drilled holes in preparation for the children's activity of building bird nest boxes.

A new category award was established to recognize the less typical category of the art of cooking. The cooks of year went to Carolle and Glenn Aldinger. Carolle and Glenn have baked cookies for special events and for the seasonal opening of the Assateague lighthouse. But this award encompasses more than the title implies. Glenn and Carolle, volunteer liaisons of the Chincoteague Refuge Volunteers, were self motivated to cook up projects, adding key ingredients to make the projects efficient while providing a completed plate to serve the refuge staff. Glenn and Carolle created a library file system for the refuge and labeled an entire book collection which consisted of 2,700 books. They created a database for the refuge museum property which consists of an extensive collection of duck and geese decoys, along with various historical guns and accoutrements.

The grand evening ended with awarding Volunteer of Year for 2005 to a couple, Lee and Gerry Woltman. This couple can be described as the handy man and woman of all trades. From biological projects and maintenance work to visitor service projects, this couple eagerly offers their help. Lee and Gerry have been an asset to the biological department in staffing the deer check-in station; participating in deer spotlight surveys; posting signs in the shorebird breeding areas; and posting hunt boundary signs. Their volunteer work extends to maintenance projects such as participating in the Wallops Island trash pickup and helping maintain squirrel nest boxes. Gerry and Lee proudly represent Chincoteague Refuge and are ready to share their knowledge with the public at refuge celebrations and on Earth Day at the Salisbury Zoo.

Our dedicated volunteers bring a lifetime of diverse experiences to our programs and are a vital resource to refuge staff and visitors. It's their compassion for the refuge that continues to shine through. "By having the opportunity to work with the volunteers, we get to enjoy their enthusiasm and the refuge staff is proud of the contributions made by this special group of people" exclaims Acting Refuge Manager, Sue Rice.