

[From Fall 2004]

Refuge Volunteers Honored

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge offers many wonderful sights - the numerous birds migrating through, the crashing of waves against the glistening sand, and a painter's dream of brilliant sunsets over the waters of Toms Cove.

Visitors have the opportunity to witness these magnificent displays of nature. The Chincoteague Refuge Volunteers treasure these moments as well, but go a step beyond. As Helen Keller stated, "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen, nor touched ... but are felt in the heart." The volunteers give a part of themselves back to the refuge. They donate their time, enthusiasm and efforts working on projects and helping the refuge staff in managing the refuge for both the wildlife and the public.

Volunteers donated approximately 16,000 hours of time helping the refuge biological, maintenance, administrative and visitor service staffs. In celebration of their accomplishments, a banquet was held earlier this year to honor them. The event highlighted volunteers' milestones, achievements, divisional awards and volunteer of the year.

Benny Bowden was recognized as the volunteer who went the furthest in representing the refuge. Benny traveled to Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in Florida to help staff the refuge's exhibits at the National Centennial Celebration. He also helped at refuge events throughout the year.

The Visitor Center Award went to Joan and Phil Moschitta, who enthusiastically share their knowledge of the refuge with visitors. They are board members of the Chincoteague Natural History Association and represented CNHA at the National Friends Conference in Washington D.C. Phil also shares his lively wit as an interpreter on the CNHA Wildlife Tours, and he and Joan participate in the monthly Marine Debris Study beach sweeps.

The Biology Division Award went to Walt Schmitz for this hardiness in venturing up the service road weekly to take valuable water gauge and salinity readings in all 14 of the refuge's water impoundments. The data collected by Walt helps the biology staff manage the impoundments to improve habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

The Visitor Service's Division Award was presented to Glenn and Carolle Aldinger for various projects they have initiated and for their active leadership role. The Aldingers have nonstop drive and talents that extend from computer programs to trail usage surveys. Currently, they have taken on the tedious task of setting up the filing system for the refuge's library. Glenn and Carolle are the volunteer liaisons for the Chincoteague Refuge Volunteers and represented the group at the National Friends Conference in Washington D.C. Their efforts contribute to the quality of the volunteer program.

The Maintenance Division Award was given to Carl Palmer for his energy, devotion, and time he puts into a project from start to finish. Carl has exemplary skills and knowledge in carpentry, has served as a Service Elderhostel crew leader, and helped the Youth Conservation Corps in building a bike boardwalk. Recently, he took on the tremendous task of remodeling an historical landmark - the old lighthouse keeper's quarters. His work will have a lasting impact on the lives of interns who live there and preserve the historical integrity of the house.

Project Coordinator of the Year went to Fred Pulis for coordinating projects that benefited both the habitat and visitors. For the last six years, Fred has coordinated the Marine Debris Study Beach Sweep. The data collected from the monthly sweep is sent to the Ocean Conservancy for use in finding the major sources of pollution. Our refuge volunteers were the only group in the study to

never miss a monthly beach sweep! Fred also served as a crew leader for the Service Elderhostel programs and coordinated with refuge staff in organizing the 5K run for International Migratory Bird Celebration.

Volunteers of the Year for 2003 went to Jack and Dolly Keene, who showed their passionate commitment to the refuge in various ways throughout the years. When they started as volunteers they helped replant pine trees after the southern pine beetle infestation and also planted dune grasses. Jack and Dolly faithfully staff the visitor center and walk or bicycle the trails to share information and answer visitor questions. Jack and Dolly are also on the CNHA board. They represented CNHA at the National Friends Conference in Washington D.C. and at the Region 5 Friends Conference in Hadley, Mass. During celebrations, Jack devotes his skill to building bird houses while Dolly peanut butters up her hands in making bird feeders.

One evening honoring the Chincoteague Refuge Volunteers is a small token of appreciation when compared to all the hours, energy, and positive contributions they have given the refuge. But the refuge staff hopes that the Volunteers know that the refuge staff is eternally grateful and proud.

If you would like to volunteer at the refuge or need further information, please contact the volunteer coordinator, Geralyn Mireles.