

IDNR Salutes 2021 Volunteers Of The Year At Illinois State Fair

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) today announced recipients of the 2021 Outstanding Volunteer of the Year awards, recognizing individuals and members of outdoors organizations for their volunteer service to the IDNR.

“Volunteers dedicate thousands of hours of their time assisting staff and visitors at our state parks, state historic sites, and state museum facilities every year, and we are pleased to welcome a number of those volunteers to the state fair to salute them for their efforts on behalf of the people of Illinois,” **said IDNR Director Colleen Callahan.**



The IDNR Outstanding Volunteers of the Year awards ceremony, honoring this year's award recipients, will be held during the Illinois State Fair at 11:00 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 21, at the Conservation World amphitheater on the fairgrounds in Springfield.

The 2021 IDNR Outstanding Volunteers of the Year are:

Alan Clarke, Ottawa

Alan Clarke, a retired engineer and member of the Ottawa Garden Club, helped staff the front desk at the Starved Rock State Park Visitor Center on behalf of the Starved Rock Foundation. Mr. Clarke enjoyed sharing his knowledge of the history of the park with visitors. As an accomplished woodworker, he made a custom bird feeder for the park's bird viewing area near the Visitor Center. Mr. Clarke passed away his home at age 88 on June 16, 2021.

Bill Egan, Creal Springs

Bill Egan has dedicated his volunteer service to a variety of duties at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site near Collinsville. Mr. Egan welcomes visitors to the site's Interpretive Center, providing tours of the gallery and seating guests for orientation

programs, as well as providing dozens of interpretive tours on the grounds of the site. Mr. Egan also volunteers to give talks on Cahokia Mounds to community groups and civic organizations at libraries, senior centers, and schools. With his knowledge and sense of humor, site staff consider Bill Egan an irreplaceable interpreter for his participation in programs and assisting visitors at Cahokia Mounds.

Sue and Bill Komarek, Peru

Sue and Bill Komarek are longtime volunteers at Starved Rock State Park as members of the Starved Rock Foundation. Each Friday during the months of April through December, the Komareks volunteer at the park's Visitor Center, with Bill operating the front desk to answer visitor questions about the park's history and trails while Sue operates the Foundation's Le Rocher Gift Shop.

Dana Lach, Carbondale

Dana Lach has provided countless volunteer hours and dedicated service at Giant City State Park for 18 years. Ms. Lach has served as a board member for the Friends of Giant City, a bluebird monitor, and most recently as a docent at the park's Visitor Center, greeting visitors and providing recommendations for interesting things to see and trails to hike at Giant City.

Linda and Arnold Leder, Mendota

Linda and Arnie Leder (with their dog Cocoa), frequent hikers on the trails at Starved Rock and Matthiessen state parks, bring their interest in nature and history to a variety of volunteer roles at Starved Rock. Arnie attended Master Naturalist training at Starved Rock and is a certified hike leader, directing groups on the trails and helping with school programs and special events at the park. Both Arnie and Linda participate in and Linda makes costumes for the popular "Ghosts of Starved Rock's Past" event. The Leders also assist with staffing the Visitor Center information desk and Starved Rock Foundation gift shop.

Dorcy Prosser, Carbondale

Dorcy Prosser has provided dependable and enthusiastic volunteer service assisting staff and visitors at Giant City State Park for nearly 14 years. As a former teacher, Ms. Prosser uses her expertise to assist the park interpreter with school programs and is always at the park on busy weekends and holidays to greet visitors and answer questions about hiking trails, natural features, and other attractions at Giant City. In addition, Ms. Prosser earned Master Naturalist certification and shares her love and knowledge of the park in a new role as a roving naturalist volunteer.

Keith Smith, Clinton

Keith Smith, after retiring as a police officer, has served as a campground host for 16 years at Clinton Lake State Recreation Area. Being a campground host at Clinton Lake

involves more than checking in campers. With more than 300 reservable campsites to check, Mr. Smith is also busy making rounds, answering visitor questions about recreation opportunities at the site, helping with campground cleanup efforts, and assisting park staff.

Sarah Walczynski, Tonica

Sarah Walczynski developed and created the website for the Starved Rock Foundation, training Foundation volunteers and Starved Rock State Park staff on utilizing the enhanced website to further promote visitor education and interest in the park's natural features and history. The Foundation website provides updated information on programs and events at the park, links to register for guided hikes, easy-to-navigate information on Starved Rock history, and visitor planning recommendations.

Friends of Oblates Nature Preserves, Godfrey

The Friends of Oblates Nature Preserves was founded in 2015 to provide stewardship, protection, monitoring and public education and outreach about the 16.5-acre Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserves and surrounding 143 acres of protected lands in Madison County, part of the Illinois Forest Legacy program. The Friends group logs hundreds of volunteer hours annually removing exotic plants and trash, planting local ecotype seeds and plants to improve the diversity of the woods, preparing firebreaks and for prescribed burns, and assisting Illinois Nature Preserves Commission staff with protection efforts. The group also hosts public workdays and wildflower hikes.

Jim Pflasterer and Steve Burke, Valmeyer

Jim Pflasterer and Steve Burke have been volunteering with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission at the 594-acre Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve in southwest Illinois for 13 and nine years respectively, providing more than 12,000 volunteer hours between them. The Pflasterer/Burke team cleared brush from the Reserve's 18 hill prairies and glades, removed invasive plants, monitored nearly a dozen threatened and endangered species, prepared sites for prescribed burning, collected seeds for restoration efforts, maintained five miles of trails, and assisted scientists doing research at the site. They also assist with biological surveys, create displays and present programs for school groups, and advocate for conservation with site visitors.