

Phyllis Hassinger Recognized For Volunteer Service

By Kris Fister
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Phyllis Hassinger, flanked by park employees Sean O'Donnell and Kris Fister. Photo by Jim Wood

Phyllis Hassinger, a spry 85-year old great-grandmother from Wasilla, Alaska, was recognized for her twenty seasons of volunteer campground host service in Denali National Park and Preserve during an informal ceremony that took place at the evening Wonder Lake campground program on Saturday, July 4th.

The event and award were a surprise to Phyllis, who was coaxed into attending by her visiting family members, in spite of it being her day off. Mark Motsko, Denali's volunteer coordinator, presented her with the award. He and the several other NPS staff present have worked with Phyllis for many years, and have all experienced the extra effort she puts forth in doing the best

possible for Wonder Lake campers and for other park visitors. Park staff also managed to get a large cake out to the campground relatively unscathed, which was enjoyed by everyone afterwards.

Phyllis and her husband Harry, who passed away in April 2007, spent all but one of their Denali volunteer seasons at Wonder Lake, which is located 85 miles into the heart of the park and well known for its abundant population of mosquitoes. The site has no phone service, no internet, and no electricity except the motor home's small generator. The closest grocery store, medical service, or other amenities that many of us take for granted are over four hours away via a winding, dirt and gravel road.

Phyllis and Harry were recognized with "Presidents Call to Service" Awards in 2005 for each giving over 6,000 hours of volunteer service to the National Park Service. Phyllis has returned to Wonder Lake alone because of the place, which was so special to both of them, and because of the wonderful people she has met there over the years, many of whom are now her friends. By providing that extra touch of caring and kindness she is so well known for, Phyllis continues to enrich the experience of those hardy campers who have traveled in a bus for hours, and braved the insects and other elements for the possibility of a breathtaking view of "the mountain" from their campsite.

Even though we are celebrating her 20th season in the park, we're all hoping she's coming back for more!