



National Park Service News Release

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Two From Glacier Bay Receive National Freeman Tilden Award

Putting together the tale of a whale named “Snow” has earned **Kelly Vandenberg** and **Melissa Senac** of Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve the 2014 National Park Service Freeman Tilden Award for Excellence in Interpretation.

Sightings of whales, sea lions, seals, and sea otters thrill visitors to Alaska’s Glacier Bay and Snow, humpback whale #68, was a fan favorite for years. After death, Snow continues to fascinate visitors through the efforts of Vandenberg and Senac, who created exhibits that feature the whale’s skeleton and the skeleton of a juvenile orca whale. The exhibits showcase the size and anatomy of the whales while evoking empathy and respect for them and appreciation for their protection.

“Kelly and Melissa’s exhibits provide a glimpse into the underwater world of Glacier Bay,” said National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis. “They illustrate how national parks are classrooms without walls – where story and place combine to make life-long learning exciting.”



The 45-foot long Snow is the largest humpback whale skeleton on display in the United States. Vandenberg and Senac had no comparative project to emulate or blueprint to follow as they prepared to place Snow on display in an outside, open-air exhibit. Every aspect of the project delved into uncharted waters. Vandenberg and Senac had to decide on shelter design, bone consolidation, finishing options, skeletal pose, structural supports, and informational sign design and location.



VandenBerg and Senac also involved the Gustavus community, especially school children, in the projects. Students helped clean, prepare, and assemble the two skeletons. Earlier this year, both whale skeletons were unveiled during ceremonies that included multiple speakers, youth activities, educational carnivals, and special Tlingit presentations. Tlingit elders provided meaningful cultural blessings, speeches, and spirit songs and gave each whale a Tlingit native name that forever unites them to their homeland – *Tsalxaan Tayee Yaay* (Whale beneath Mount Fairweather) and *Keet’k* (Little Whale). The orca skeleton was placed in the town’s library where it now swims above the reading area.

VandenBerg and Senac also produced social media posts and online resources for the project including project blogs, videos, time lines, photo galleries, and teacher curriculum. This year, more than 500 students and 40 teachers took part in 33 on-site educational programs. Due to the skill and creativity of Vandenberg and Senac, both whales will long continue to provide visitors, both in-person and online, with a peek into the life of these magnificent species and their physiology, traits, and challenges.

Each year, the Freeman Tilden Award recognizes outstanding contributions in interpretation and education by National Park Service employees. Nominees are judged on creativity, originality, and positive contributions toward enhancing the public’s understanding of national park resources.

The award is named for Freeman Tilden, the author of *The National Parks, What They Mean to You and Me* and *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Tilden’s writings have had considerable influence on National Park Service interpretation and education programs.

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