Thomas Edison NHP Receives NPS Accessibility Award

In early October, the Disabilities Awareness Committee of Thomas Edison National Historical Park received the 2011 National Park Service Accessibility Achievement Award for Educational Leadership. The award was presented in a ceremony in Washington, DC, on November 3.

The award recognizes the Park for its “outstanding commitment and leadership in the design, planning, and implementation of two innovative accessibility awareness training programs for park staff, volunteers, and representatives from over 24 different national and state parks, museums, and historic sites.”

The workshops, which were featured in an earlier newsletter, took place during the summer. The first, on August 2, focused on Welcoming visitors who are blind or visually impaired to your site. The August 9 workshop addressed How to welcome visitors on the Autism Spectrum to your cultural institution or site. The two workshops were made possible with special VIP funds.

Since hosting the workshops, the Park has welcomed two groups of visitors who are blind or have low vision, with Rangers presenting a hands-on audio-described tour for each group. Park staff have also made progress on a Park social story, designed to help visitors with autism prepare for their visit. When finished, the social story will be available on the park website. Work also continues on producing training DVDs from the video recordings of the workshops. The Committee hopes that national recognition within National Park Service will encourage other parks to host similar workshops and work towards accessibility for all visitors.

Congratulations! And the 2011 Accessibility Achievement Award for Educational Leadership goes to: the Thomas Edison NHP Disabilities Awareness Committee. Julia Washburn (center), NPS Associate Director for Interpretation and Education, presents the award to members of the committee. From left, Park Ranger Diana McKeage, Volunteer Evelyn Gurland, Park Ranger Claire Shields, Associate Director Washburn, Chief of Interpretation Karen Sloat-Olsen, Acting Superintendent Terri Jung, and Glenmont Curator Beth Miller.
This past August, Hurricane Irene raged up the east coast. High winds and saturating rain, coupled with months of record rainfall, proved to be too much for several trees at the Glenmont Estate; nine sustained serious damage.

Two had to be completely removed, and others lost large branches but survived with expert trimming. A large Scarlet Oak tree and a Mockernut Hickory were uprooted. Pruning preserved a Chinese Chestnut, a Beech, a Red Maple, a Black Locust, and a second Mockernut Hickory.

In response to the widespread damage the National Park Service assembled its first Arborist Incident Response Team, comprised of NPS-certified arborists from parks on the east coast and responsible for the careful mitigation of damaged trees. The arborists use bucket trucks and chain saws, of course, but must also be willing to climb damaged trees. Eager to save trees, their main objective is to remove hazards so visitors can enjoy the park safely.

The surprise snow storm at the end of October weighed down recovering trees and pushed some of them beyond their limits. During the storm popping, cracking, and thuds could be heard as more branches broke and fell. Due to the earlier efforts of the maintenance division and the Arborist Incident Response Team, damage was not as severe as it could have been.

On a happier note, in mid-October Marcia Zweig, a volunteer from the Garden Club of the Oranges, noticed that some of the buds on the night-blooming cereus (Epiphyllum oxypetalum) were preparing to open. With an alert from Protection Ranger Eddie Grimes, Marcia returned to find three plants blooming at night “with wonderful fragrance and the loveliest flower-within a flower-within a flower.” She took photos in the morning, since the plant is easier to photograph without a flash.
Hats Off to Our VIPs:  
A Year-End Volunteer Report

Our volunteer corps remained strong and steady in the fiscal year that just ended on September 30, making contributions to several significant projects.

With special VIP Funds we offered Disability Awareness Workshops which went on to receive the 2011 NPS National Accessibility Achievement Award for Educational Leadership.

The Master Gardeners of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Essex County replanted and maintained a prominent flowerbed near the entrance of Glenmont. This fulfilled a high priority recommendation in the recently completed Cultural Landscape Report for Glenmont.

Rob Sprecher vastly improved communication within our volunteer corps by establishing a volunteer blog where information about Thomas Edison and the park can be shared among volunteers and park staff.

Bryan “BJ” Johnson transcribed Thomas Edison’s marginalia contained in over 200 books located in the Laboratory Complex. We will add the transcribed information to catalog records for those books in the NPS electronic database.

Special thanks to everyone who volunteered at Thomas Edison NHP this year!

VIP Hours at a Glance

Total VIP hours: 7,561  
(FY2010: 7,211 hours)  
Total Volunteers: 74  
(FY2010: 85 volunteers)

High-achievers this year:

Rob Sprecher, 932 hours  
Bryan “BJ” Johnson, 667 hours  
Gaye Olin, 651 hours  
Valerie Shoffner, 346 hours  
Tom Hilmer, 323 hours  
Janet Armstrong, 307 hours  
Sean Coakley, 277 hours  
Arthur Gordon, 229 hours  
Yvan Beausoleil, 214 hours  
Sue Kaufmann, 178 hours  
Rita DiMatteo, 154 hours  
Evelyn Gurland, 133 hours  
Amy Trimarco, 119 hours  
Matthew Cicero, 116 hours  
Eddie Grimes, 111 hours  
Harry Roman, 111 hours  
Suzi Butler, 111 hours  
Nancy Farley, 110 hours  
Marcia Zweig, 104 hours  
Claire Shields, 101 hours

Another Great Seton Hall Prep Summer

This year’s interns from Seton Hall Preparatory School proved to be an outstanding group, enthusiastic, eager to learn, and willing to help out in any way they could. The five interns, Alex Stevenson, Charlie Johnson, Calvin Millien, Tre Turner and Scott Jung – had an opportunity to experience the full range of activities at the park.

With the Maintenance Division they helped to look after the grounds at both Glenmont and the Laboratory Complex. Wednesdays through Fridays they helped organize Park records in Administration and assisted the Curatorial staff in cataloging parts of the collection, answering research requests, cleaning historic areas, and moving artifacts. Working with Visitor Services, they greeted visitors, assisted in presenting public programs and responding to visitor questions about the site and work of Thomas Edison. We hope that Alex, Charlie, Calvin, Tre and Scott enjoyed their time at the park and will have fond memories of their summer at Edison.
EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

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This is the last paper copy of The Lab Notebook. Future newsletters will be in electronic format only. Send your email address to michelle_ortwein@nps.gov to be notified when newsletters are available on our website.

Museum Technician Greg Schmidl, 1953-2011

Greg Schmidl, 58, died peacefully at his home in Fairfield, New Jersey, on Friday, November 11, 2011.

Greg was born in Newark and spent his childhood in Belleville. He earned his BA in History & Geology from Montclair State College and worked as a geologist in the oil fields of Wyoming before returning to New Jersey to work in steel sales. He joined Thomas Edison National Historical Park as a museum technician in 1991 and quickly became involved in most aspects of the Park’s curatorial program: cataloging, packing, and storing artifacts; moving collections, planning storage space, researching and planning the restoration of historic rooms in the lab; monitoring temperature and humidity.

Friendly, affable, and always willing to help, Greg was a valuable member of our Edison family and will be greatly missed by all of us.

Greg Schmidl with former NPS Northeast Regional Director Mary Bowmar during her visit to Edison in 2005.