



The Lab Notebook

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.”



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.

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.

Message from the Acting Superintendent

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service.

At a town hall meeting on August 25, 2011, NPS Director Jon Jarvis announced *A Call to Action*, a call to all NPS employees and partners to commit to actions that advance the Service toward a shared vision for 2016 and our second century.

From Director Jon Jarvis:

“On the eve of our centennial, the employees of the National Park Service have imagined our second century of public service and charted a path to help us achieve that vision.

A Call to Action offers tangible, concrete ways for us to work together to transform our organization to make sure that we are ready for a future that is, in so many ways, different from our past. It includes bold new ideas and expands on terrific ideas that are already field-tested.

A Call to Action also signals the start of a strategic integration of national parks and National Park Service community-based programs. This will increase our reach and better leverage our resources to invite the American people to learn more about our mission and join us in the stewardship of our nation's most incredible places.

Every park, every program, every employee, and every partner has a role in this *Call to Action*. For it to succeed, for the National Park Service to succeed, we need your creativity, innovation, and dedication to make these action items real in your park or your program.

In this watershed moment, like no other time in our history, we have an opportunity to reflect on, celebrate, and build on our accomplishments as we prepare to serve for a second century. Please answer the call.”

I hope everyone will take a few minutes to look at *A Call to Action*. It is available online at <http://inside.nps.gov/calltoaction/> or www.nps.gov/calltoaction. There are also copies in Building 4 and Building 3. Or let me know if you would like me to email a copy to you.

In the weeks ahead, we will be talking about how our Park can become involved. I look forward to hearing from all of you!

Terri Jung

Thomas Edison National Historical Park was established to preserve and protect Thomas Alva Edison's West Orange Laboratory, home, and collections for the education and inspiration of people worldwide.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Forces of Nature at Glenmont



Supervisory Museum Curator Michelle Ortwein with a fallen tree at Glenmont.

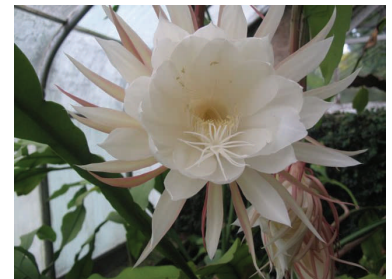
This past August, Hurricane Irene raged up the east coast. High winds and saturating rain, coupled with months of record rainfall, proved to be too much for several trees at the Glenmont Estate; nine sustained serious damage.

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.



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

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 with visitors at the Chemistry Lab.



Bryan "BJ" Johnson at work on the marginalia project.

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!



Our Seton Hall Prep Interns take time out for a field trip to Sandy Hook with Edison Administrative Officer Sheila Hamilton. From left, Alex Stevenson, Tre Turner, Sheila, Charlie Johnson, Calvin Millien, and Scott Jung.

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.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

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Service"

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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.