

Bob Wallen

Bob retired from the DNR after 31 years of service. The world first met him in October of 1943 at Holy Family Hospital, Manitowoc Wis.

After 8 years at St Boniface grade school he moved on to Washington Jr High and then Lincoln High where he graduated in 1962. Bob, active in scouting obtained the Eagle rank. He enjoyed fishing and hunting with his dad and brother, helping in the family garden and playing with the neighborhood "gang" games like kick the can and star light moon light. He also fondly remembers visiting with family on a farm near Iola and week long trips to Duluth to see relatives.



After high school Bob attended the University of Wisconsin - Manitowoc for a year and a half and then moved to the Madison campus where he graduated with a BS degree in Natural Sciences-Education. For two years he worked out of the State Laboratory of Hygiene on the UW campus assisting a doctor of veterinary medicine in the Zoonotic section who was doing research on California Encephalitis, a mosquito borne disease. Bob then returned to the UW for an additional 20 credits in natural resource related courses. In 1970, he obtained a job at Blue Mound State Park. After only 10 days at that position he was offered a position at the Conservation Education Center in Poynette, renamed in 1971 to the Mackenzie Environmental Education Center. After a few seasons he became a full time Natural Resources Educator.

Bob and his wife Susan left Madison, purchased a home and settled in the Town of Windsor conveniently located about half way between Poynette and Susan's elementary school teaching position in the Madison school district. Their son, Andrew Thor, was born in 1967 (deceased 2009) and daughter Sara came along in 1971. Sara now lives with her husband John and a blended family on 40 acres near the little community of Francis Creek in Manitowoc County.

As an educator, Bob's position involved a great deal of variety. He revamped, developed and helped maintain museum exhibits, nature

trails and trail guides. His job also involved giving guided tours of the wildlife exhibit, trails and museums for the general public, students, teachers and sometimes international visitors . Bob coordinated, trained and mentored student interns from various universities and colleges who spent time learning while helping at the center. For several summers in the early 70's he assisted in the running of week long camps for high school age girls at Wyalusing State Park. These camps provided the girls with an exposure to conservation, natural resources and work experiences similar to what was available to boys at Youth Conservation Camps. (YCC)

In 1975, the department built an overnight facility at Poynette. This allowed students and their teachers to come for a stay of 2-3 days while being involved in conservation and natural resource oriented activities on and off sight. Bob, along with other staff, developed and presented multi-day workshops with resource and conservation themes for teachers. He also provided a DNR presence at many statewide teachers' conventions and the Wisconsin State Fair.

In the late 80's Bob and Joel Stone put together a maple sugaring program for students using the many Maple trees that Harley MacKenzie had planted in the 1930's. During the month of March, as many as 2000 students participated in the two hour hands-on program learning about the value of forests and trees, photosynthesis and the process of making Maple syrup. The program continues to this day with 50-70 trained volunteers helping staff provide the program. The season ends with a Saturday open house for the general public. In 2000, Bob was honored by having the new sugar shack named after him.



Since retiring, Bob and Sue devote time to their daughter and son-in-law and their blended family of 8 children. Four are still at home. Bob and Sue enjoy gardening, traveling throughout Wisconsin and the United States. They spend a month during winter in places like Gulf Shores, AL, Port Aransas, TX and Sanibel Island, FL.



They have also traveled to Germany/Austria, Italy, and Costa Rica where they birded, fished and soaked in the warm pools of a stream heated by the Arenal Volcano. Until recently Bob's brother and sister lived in Juneau, Alaska and this allowed for frequent visits there.

Back in the late 80's Bob's brother came to Wisconsin and used his Windsor garage and driveway to create a sculpture of a life size Brown Bear as a 25th year commemoration of Alaska's statehood. Bob spent many hours after work and weekends helping his brother with that project.



The bronze is now located on the state capitol grounds in Juneau, Alaska. Then in 2005, Bob and Sue had the opportunity to again help his brother Skip with another bronze, this one created on Sanibel Island, Florida. This monument was to commemorate the WWII Lend Lease program by which over 8000 aircraft were flown to Ladd Field, Fairbanks, Alaska where they were then flown by Russian pilots across the Bearing Sea to the Russian front. A ten foot Russian and American pilot in flying garb against a full size P-39 propeller now stand near the Chena River near downtown Fairbanks, Alaska.

In 2014, Bob and Sue relocated back to their hometown, Manitowoc, WI. Bob is again assisting his brother, also now relocated to Manitowoc, with another bronze to be sighted along the Lake Michigan shoreline between Manitowoc and Two Rivers. Funds for this project, called Spirit of the Rivers, are being raised by The Spirit of the Rivers Foundation. This monument will be three 10 foot Native Americans, one carrying a canoe.

When not sculpting or caring for grandchildren, Bob still enjoys traveling, fishing, hunting, and photographing rural scenes, especially, farms, barns and silos.