



Volunteers About Town

Gray, Maine— Newsletter Special



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: KAREN TAYLOR

Karen Taylor is the 2019-2020 recipient of the Volunteer of the year award given by the Town of Gray!

A Gray Historical Society member for nearly 30 years Karen goes about her work preserving and protecting the history of Gray. A lifelong resident of Gray growing up on Colley Hill and attending Pennell Institute Karen is very knowledgeable of Gray's past. Climbing the stairs to the historical museum each week Karen goes about her tasks along with the others who gather there. Because of her knowledge of Gray and the workings of the society, members depend on Karen to advise and direct them.

When members have a problem or have an inquiry from the public that is a mystery the phrase "ask Karen" can usually be heard!

Karen was the driving force behind the relocation of the soldier's monument in 1997 and the inscribing of the names of over 200 veterans of the monument. A member of the Pennell Alumni, Crystal Lake Association as well as other civic organizations and committees over the years, Karen exemplifies the spirit of volunteerism.

As a valued member of the Crystal Lake Association Board of Directors for her tenure of 15 years, Karen has held the offices of vice president, secretary, treasurer and area representative.

GHS is proud of her and her accomplishments, and for holding our society together over the years.

Karen's volunteer and "can do" attitude is the "glue" that holds us together.

Thank you Karen for all you do to make the town of the Gray the great place to live that it is.

Lifetime Achievement Award: Charlena Walker

Congratulations to Charlena Walker for the 2019-2020 Lifetime Achievement Award!

Charlena is a long-time resident of Gray and has made a major impact on the Community. Curt Johnson, Superintendent of the Maine Wildlife Park had this to say about Charlena:

Charlena is one of our most dedicated, dependable, and loyal volunteers at the park. For at least 17 years, she has been faithfully tending the Friends Snack Shack on her assigned days and shifts, which now average about 60 shifts a year. At 4 hours each, Charlena volunteers a *minimum* of 240 hours/year at the park. But that's not all! Charlena is one of the few "go to" volunteers who is often called upon whenever another Snack Shack volunteer calls in sick or is otherwise absent. Charlena always makes every effort to fill in and cover these empty shifts to ensure that the Shack stays open for our visitors and the Friends. Work in the Shack is no picnic for Charlena or any SS volunteer; summer months bring massive crowds, unruly children, and scorching temps that all must be dealt with. Spring and Fall fill the Shack with school kids and often frigid temps since the SS doors stay wide open regardless of the weather. The SS attendant is usually always alone - handling all sales, restocking, answering visitor questions, and helping troubleshoot all kinds of problems that may arise in the Shack and beyond. Charlena has interacted with nearly 250,000 visitors over her volunteer career at the park; making kids happy in receiving their special park treat, answering questions, and playing a major role in shaping a positive park experience for our guests.



In addition to volunteering at the Shack, Charlena has been thoroughly involved with the Friends group. She faithfully attends monthly meetings and is involved with Friends activities, voting, and often weighing in on SS issues and happenings in group discussion. She has been a part of all the major decisions and projects that the Friends have tackled over the years, and I'm having a hard time remembering any Friends meeting over the past 15 years where Charlena wasn't there

Charlena has been provided critical help in keeping the Snack Shack open and functioning. The Shack's operation has been the primary fundraising mechanism for the Friends for many years, making Charlena's volunteer contributions all the more significant for the Friends, the Park, and its wildlife inhabitants. She is cherished by all of us, and is certainly a worthy recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Volunteer Award!

In addition, long time volunteer and President of the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park, Ray Clark added "I'd like to second Curt Johnson's enthusiastic endorsement of Charlena! She's one of the best volunteers I know—she's the first person the coordinator of the Snack Shack calls when the scheduled person doesn't show up (my wife is the second). She's always patient and friendly with the patrons. And she consistently pays attention in Friends' meetings, offering cogent comments. You can't do better than Charlena!"

Charlena's efforts at the Maine Wildlife Park may be her primary focus, but certainly not her only volunteer work in her over 40 years as a Gray resident. She began volunteering for the Dry Mills Schoolhouse Committee back in October 2008 sharing her many years of experience (in education in the GNG system) in the area of curriculum and programming. She was responsible for updating the brochure, was the volunteer coordinator, worked on grant proposals, worked on plans for building repairs and served as acting Chair and as Treasurer. Charlena would run over to the Schoolhouse on her break from volunteering at the Wildlife Park to open the building or close it on her way home. Charlena retired from the DMS Committee in 2018 after a decade of service. She is still the eyes of the Schoolhouse - checking on the building as she reports for her volunteer shift at the Park and reporting back to the Town Office if there are any issues.

Charlena's love for history was not just focused on the Dry Mills Schoolhouse, but shared as a volunteer for the Gray Historical Society where she began volunteering in the early 2000's and continued until her duties on the Dry Mills Schoolhouse Committee and at the Wildlife Park took precedence.

Charlena has been a true asset to the Town of Gray, but she was also an early and ardent volunteer at the Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum in Portland. [From 1996 through 2008, she volunteered weekly at the NGRM to assist with various volunteer efforts including work in their gift shop, selling tickets and giving guided tours of the museum.](#) Charlena did all of this while raising her family and participating in activities at the Schools and remains an active participant in the Town's activities.

— Sandy Carder, Town Council Chair

Evelyn Morrill Durgin

Award: Jennifer Dupuis

Congratulations to Jennifer Dupuis for receiving the 2019 -2020 Evelyn Morrill Durgin Award!

Jenn has quietly been serving the people of Gray for 15 years. Starting with the Lions Club in Yarmouth in 2000, she transferred to the Gray-New Gloucester Club in 2005. Even though she was running her own daycare and raising two active boys, she was active in fundraising and community efforts. She was instrumental in adding 6 new members to the Club in her first 2 years of service. After serving as the formal questioner for the annual Lions Club HS Speaking Contest, she is now the Program Coordinator, organizing and conducting the event. She is also the Peace Poster Contest coordinator which involves Middle School students who create a poster based on a set theme about peace. Both Contests lead to Regional and/or International opportunities for participants. This is one of the many ways Jenn engages with the School Dept and Community. She is always ready to help with raffles, car shows, bake sales and walks in the Annual White Cane Awareness event before engaging residents at the Gray Shop N' Save – educating and advocating for those with visual impairments.



This alone is quite an achievement, but Jenn also joined the Dry Mills Schoolhouse Committee in the Fall of 2008 as the Secretary/Treasurer before taking over as the Committee Chair. She was instrumental in ensuring the Schoolhouse was open to the public, coordinating volunteers and helping to prepare curriculum for the many visitors. She is a strong advocate of Historical accuracy and guards the integrity of the Schoolhouse as if it were a priceless treasure, because it is to her and the Community. When the Schoolhouse was closed, the Committee went dormant. My first call upon reactivating the Committee in the summer of 2017 was to Jenn. Her response “what can I do to help”. She has been a leading force behind reinvigorating the Committee, the Mission and the Goal. She never runs out of ideas and always has an action plan to go along with them. She is willing to participate in the many activities set up to engage residents and fully supports the coordination with the ExCel Students at GHG HS.

In addition to these more formal volunteer efforts, Jenn is very active at the Gray First Congregational Church, helping with Sunday School, Meet & Greet outreach and with the Music Program. She is a gifted vocalist and shares that gift by performing hour long musical programs with her Sister and Father at local Nursing Homes. Memory Care Facilities specifically request them.

But, the most amazing thing about Jenn is her ability to inspire everyone she volunteers with or entertains or helps. When speaking with Joe Murray with The Lions Club, he summed it up perfectly. “The Club is a group founded on service to the blind and visually impaired. It is pretty special to see how Jenn has accepted her diminishing eyesight and not let it stand in the way of anything that she wants to accomplish. She makes it easy for others to be comfortable around her and neither asks nor expects to be treated any differently than anyone else. It says a lot about her strength of character.”

— Sandy Carder, Town Council Chair



Maine Spirit of America Foundation Tribute: Ray Clark

The 2019–2020 Gray, Maine Spirit of America Foundation Tribute honors Ray Clark for his long, distinguished, and commendable community service to the town.

A Resolution by the Gray Town Council is as follows:

Whereas, Ray served as editor of the Gray News for many years, sharing folksy wisdom and political commentary; and

Whereas, Ray served for many years on the Gray Library Board of Trustees, ably piloting the library through a \$1.5 million renovation and the search for a new Library Director; and

Whereas, Ray has always been willing to get his hands dirty, as evidenced by this story from Josh Tiffany, Gray Library Director, who began work just before the Gray Library renovations were set to begin. “About a week before the ground was officially broken by our contractors, I was told I had to get the basement of the library cleaned out. At that point, the basement had been the longtime home of the GPLA book sale, plus the “storage” for years of items that weren’t thrown away yet no one had any idea why they were retained in the first place... After putting out calls for help to anyone whose email I had, I and a few staff members entered the dark basement and started the process of unclogging generations of stuff to make way for our new library. Within a matter of hours Ray arrived on site and put in more work than me and my staff combined. He put in more hours than any other volunteer and worked until we were all drenched and sweaty and exhaustion. And through his tireless help, we were able to achieve our goal. But seeing him breathing hard, dripping with sweat, yet smiling the entire time let me know the character of this man...,” and

Whereas, For many years Ray gave a dramatic reading of “The Night Before Christmas” at the annual tree lighting ceremony at town hall, delighting both children and adults; and

Whereas, Ray helped found the Friends of the Gray Wildlife Park and has served as Chair of the Friends for many years, successfully raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to transform the Park from the old Game Farm to the wildly popular tourist destination over 100,000 visitors enjoy each year. As Ray once said, “Kids need animals. They need to see these wild animals and understand that animals deserve respect, because I think that helps them understand that everybody deserves respect, and they do too.”

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Gray Town Council, in sincere gratitude and appreciation, that Ray Clark is hereby recognized for his exemplary citizenship and outstanding achievements with the 2019 Gray Spirit of America Foundation award.

Committee of the Year: C.E.D.C

It is with great honor that I present the Community Economic Development Committee with the "Committee of the Year" award.

As I sat reading through the first draft of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan I couldn't help but think how very much aligned the CEDC visions and goals are with that which the Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee has discovered to be the predominant views of our townspeople.

The Comp Plan identified three priority subject areas for which there is broad community support.

1. Moving people safely through Gray and getting around town via walking, biking, or car.
2. Protecting Gray's rural character and natural resources.
3. Invest in the Village and community programs.

The CEDC has established five principal "Goals".

1. Cultivate community cultural connections,
2. Revitalize and Preserve the charm of the Village
3. Support improvement, responsible expansion, and retention of established business
4. Stimulate the establishment of new business
5. Promote opportunities for local citizens to open small businesses.

CEDC goals has addressed at least one CPSC objective related to each of their priority goals.

Foremost to CEDC, of course has been beautification of our Village center. The Comp Plan draft mentions "create a sense of place in the center of town where community can gather...". CEDC visioning and action plans over this past year has focused on Village Beautification. Through the committee visioning of a pop-up park, it soon became evident that the project needed Town action and Grant funding to create the welcoming green space envisioned at 5 Yarmouth Road. The Park has now become a Town - taking a vacant lot and creating a space where community residents and visitors can gather for coffee, lunches, or just plain relaxation. This project would not have happened but for thoughtful visioning and planning at the committee level.

The CEDC Village revitalization goal also extended to daffodil planting in several visible sites in town, which was done last fall. Banners were designed over the winter months and are soon to be displayed in the Village corridor to welcome visitors and to create a cohesive street scape in the major traffic artery. Visually appealing planter boxes throughout this gateway is also in the visions of CEDC and in its planning process. Also, in the works are visually appealing murals to be painted on specific target structures at the Pennell Complex.

As to moving people around, CEDC, in conjunction with Bike Ped, has investigated traffic calming measures within the Village and made recommendation for testing temporary street closures to demonstrate how those closures could work. This project had been in its infancy planning stages when the pandemic hit putting much of everything but essential services on hold. Then CEDC became aware of other communities addressing helping their local business community by closing street to automobile traffic in order to allow business to expand their service area unto to street and allow more square footage of space for customers to safely distance in. Thus, this temporary street closure, originally designed for traffic calming now may become a potential economic boast for local eateries and retail small business. Stay tuned for further developments.

The third priority noted in the draft of the Comp Plan addressed the importance of Gray's rural character. CEDC has also demonstrated a focus on agriculture and farming. Several CEDC members stood alongside spokespeople encouraging passage of Gray's Food Sovereignty Ordinance. Members recognized the importance of the ordinance to small business in Gray. The Food Sovereignty Ordinance will allow local small agricultural and farming businesses to offer product for profit and add to the economic vitality of the town. CEDC members are also actively engaged in bringing a farmer's market to the Village to promote both a community gathering place and an economic outlet for the farming community.

CEDC is an actively engaged committee where incredible Ideas flow and are vetted. Although, they only meet once monthly, much individual time and energy is contributed by all in between meetings. What has already been accomplished or spilled over to Town projects has and will make an impact that can be enjoyed and appreciated by the whole town. CEDC members have formulated so many wonderful forward thinking plans they have had to ask for some additional financial support from the town so that more of these goals can come to fruition over the next year. Great job by a great group!

Congratulations to the Committee of the Year – Community Economic Development Committee. — Sharon Young, Town Council Liaison



Organization of the Year: Gray New Gloucester Little League (GNGLL)

The Gray New Gloucester Little League (GNGLL) is our 2019-2020 Organization of the Year!

Originally formed as separate leagues in the 1970's, the Gray and New Gloucester Little Leagues came together and merged in 2014. Each year dozens of volunteers from both communities come together to provide our children and young adults with a tremendous opportunity. In the last couple years GNGLL has realized the benefits of all the hard work undertaken to merge. GNGLL also helps build a sense of regional community which carries over to the Middle School and High School teams too.

Starting as young as 4, as many as 350 of our kids start a journey that can last for years. GNGLL not only gives them a chance to have loads of fun, it gives them a chance to play a sport and learn skills they will need and use for the rest of their lives.

Organized into 35 teams GNGLL is supported through the generosity of more than 24 local businesses and groups. Adult volunteers serve on the Board of Directors, as Coaches and Umpires. They manage concessions, help maintain the equipment, fields and more.

GNGLL has earned a reputation as a great place to hold All Star Tournaments and is asked to host these tournaments on a regularly basis. It creates an sense of Community pride to see the older players help umpire the younger players games while residents regularly come out to cheer on the kids.

Without the dedication, hard work and long hours of this revolving roster of parents and volunteers, GNGLL wouldn't be the success it has become today. For these many other reasons GNGLL is the Town of Gray's "Organization of the Year" for 2020.

Congratulations and thank you!

