

Sandgren made outdoors that much greater

Longtime superintendent of state forest dies at 61

By Karen Pilarski

Freeman Staff

DELAFIELD — Paul Sandgren often had a big smile and a slight laugh in his voice as he spoke.

Sadly, Sandgren passed away after a battle with cancer on March 24 at the age of 61.

To colleagues and friends he was more than the superintendent of the Southern Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest. He was a loving husband to Judy and a nature enthusiast who enjoyed skiing, camping, biking and golfing.

Bicycle Doctor Nordic Ski Shop owner Tom Klein knew Sandgren for 20 years. "He was the one who got Kettle Moraine State Forest to where it is today," said Klein.

He described Sandgren as super ambitious and a person who loved his job. Klein also said he was a great guy to have fun with.

"I hope others follow in his footsteps. He was like a local hero," Klein said.

He was also an active member of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, taking care of existing park and forest land as well as adding to the state's ownership of new lands.

Friends of Lapham Peak Board member Kris Maki said Sandgren's gift was his ability to accommodate all people.

"If there was a plan that wouldn't work at the park, he was tactful when he explained why," she said. Maki used the example of when mountain bikes were allowed on the hiking trail. The bike tires damaged the trail and made ruts along the path. She said cyclists also didn't tell hikers they were behind them on the trail.

"Paul provided other trails for cyc lists across the street where it was more open for them. He also paved it," she said.

One of Sandgren's greatest joys, Maki said, was starting the Smokey Bear Fun Run.

"If you can only imagine 80-90 little kids wearing shirts as Paul encouraged them all the way through," she said.

It was not uncommon for Sandgren to work long hours to make sure the trails were groomed in the winter.

A lover of the outdoors

Friends of Lapham Peak Board member Tom Davenport remembers his friend and colleague Sandgren as not being being a "desk jockey" and being "hands on and in the field." Davenport said Sandgren was a natural at balancing the many pressures put on public lands by the variety of interest groups.

"He is best known for his care and expansion of the ski and mountain bike trails in the Southern Unit," Davenport said. Sandgren updated many of the trails for safety and more optimal use.

Prior to becoming superintendent, he was the park ranger at Lapham Peak State Park.

Davenport said Sandgren was instrumental in the installation of lights for the cross country ski trails as well as their development and improvement.

"He also was a driving force behind the snowmaking project at the park, giving skiers from all over southeastern

Wisconsin and northern Illinois a reliable place to cross country ski in low-snow winters," he said.

Davenport said Sandgren was always willing to participate and help host events and races like the Colorama run at Lapham Peak. "He will be sorely missed," said Davenport.

Visitation will be held on Saturday from 9:30 a.m. at the Church of the Resurrection, W287-N3700 North Shore Drive, City of Pewaukee, until the celebration of life service at 11 a.m. Memorials appreciated to the Church of the Resurrection, AngelsGrace Hospice, Lapham Peak Friends/Snowmaking or Caring Bridge.

Email: kpilarski@conley.net

