



Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.

REFLECTIONS



Supporting the mission and programs of Northern Tier National High Adventure.

SPRING 2021 EDITION



Registration for the reunion is open!

By Vern Miller

It is getting warmer, the fishing opener was actioned packed, and summer is approaching. It is time to start thinking about joining us this summer for our biennial reunion!

This year we will host the reunion at Northern Tier's Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base from **August 20th to 22nd**.

Festivities will include attending an evening campfire, picnic in the park, afternoon activities in Ely, and banquet and auction. This year the cost will be \$115 for adults and \$35 for youth under 18.

Things may be different than in the past, as we have to accommodate COVID-19 health matters. Make sure you are ready to be outside for meals and other activities.

As of this writing, reunion registration is already almost 1/3rd filled! We encourage you to register soon as there will not be walk-in registration for the reunion or banquet. The last day to register is August 1st.

Register today at reunion.holry.org.

What to know

- The reunion starts the evening of Friday, August 20th, and ends the morning of Sunday, August 22nd.
- Families and children are welcome. *There will be many activities!*
- Registration includes lodging Friday and Saturday nights (*bring a sleeping bag or bedding*), meals Friday dinner to Sunday breakfast, t-shirt, picnic with activities, and banquet dinner and auction in Ely.
- Registration closes on Sunday, August 1st. Advance registration is necessary, as there will be no walk-ins for the reunion or banquet.
- Want to donate an item for the auction? Contact us at holry.org/about/contactus.
- Do you plan on extending your stay or taking a canoe trip? We recommend visiting the Ely Chamber of Commerce website at ely.org.

Register at reunion.holry.org!

George D. Hedrick Volunteer Service Award

By Eric Peterson

The Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc. (SAA), is pleased to announce the Boy Scouts of America's National Relationships Committee has recently approved the addition of the George D. Hedrick Volunteer Service Award for inclusion in its Community Organization Award.

The Community Organization Award is a generic term used by the BSA to identify a category of awards used by secular, national, community organizations to recognize their members for voluntary service and achievement. The SAA is now one of the 21 partners in the award.

The recognition piece, the concept of the award, and the criteria for awarding and presenting the George D. Hedrick Volunteer Service Award remain solely with the SAA.

The BSA's Community Organization Award square knot consists of an embroidered gold square knot on a purple background with a gold border. It is how the BSA recognizes Scouters who have received an approved community organization service

recognition. The knot is worn on the Scouter uniform shirt above the left pocket.



Community Organization Award

The George D. Hedrick Volunteer Service Award was created in 1995 and awarded by the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.'s board of directors. The award has recognized 23 individuals whose service and dedication to the Northern Tier National High Adventure program are noteworthy in impact and duration. The award honors former Region Ten executive and ardent supporter George Hedrick.

For more information on the award, including a nomination form, visit the website at holry.org/programs/serviceaward.

James "Allen" Rench (1975-1979) – September 6, 1956 - October 22, 2020

By Nigel Cooper

Allen and I first met in the summer of 1977. He and I had sister crews on my second trip as a "Charlie Guide." After that trip, we became close friends, and eventually, he was the best man at my wedding to Cynthia "Cyd" Diesslin Cooper (1975- 1980). Since then, our families have grown up together. We have made many memories together, many of them at Northern Tier.

Allen was born September 6, 1956, in Tulsa, Oklahoma to Robert and Mary (McCormick) Rench. Allen grew up among the Indian Nations and was very involved with the Pawnee Indians. He loved to come to the "base" for staff training and present sessions on Indian folklore to the new generation of Charlie Guides.

On March 20, 1993, Allen married Dianne Marks in Arlington, Texas. They eventually moved north (maybe not far enough for Allen) to Rochester, Minnesota. Dianne and Allen opened their home to AFS and YFU exchange students building relationships all over the world. Their home was a stopping point during the summer months for Scouts and Charlie Guides going to or from the base.

As a boy, Allen always knew he would be a Charlie Guide, influenced by his father and brother Robert and the many treks he took as a Scout. After swamper training and receiving his first contract, he knew he had arrived. From then on the

"Pink Panther" (his paddle brand), no matter which portage he crossed Obukwins, Yum Yum, Monument Portage; or waters he paddled, White Otter, Sasasginigak, Knife Lake, he was a Charlie Guide. He was very proud to hold that distinction. He was also very proud that his children Jayna, Quentin, and Tate are also "Charlie Guides." Allen served the alumni association as president from 2000 to 2004. He also received the George D. Hedrick Volunteer Service Award in 2016. He was responsible for organizing many reunions, digitizing various collections of photographs, and the leading force behind the blowdown cleanup of 1999.

Allen had a candid personality, was kind, thoughtful, and always put others first. He loved to laugh, was a master of "dad jokes," and took great pride in making connections with people and keeping people connected. He always had a smile on his face and an optimistic approach to life. He was a great husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend.

Allen crossed his final portage on October 22nd, 2020 at his home in Rochester, Minnesota. He is survived by his loving wife Dianne, children Nick, Jamie, Jayna, Quentin, and Tate, brother Robert, and seven grandchildren.

He will be missed by so many, but as he said, "*like always, I'll have the coffee pot on the fire waiting for you to arrive.*"

We knew we had the best Guide – Remembering Owen Gibbs

By Lee Huckstep

I first met Owen Gibbs on July 3, 1967, as I exited a bus. There he was: dark hair, black-rimmed glasses, and wearing a green Explorer uniform shirt. He introduced himself to Crew 703-C as our Guide. Owen hollered crazy things in a French accent to welcome us to the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base.

Owen's welcome was exciting. I was 14 years old, and this was my first real trip away from home: a canoe voyage into the Quetico Provincial Park in Canada. I was busting with excitement to be embarking on my first great adventure as a young man. And as it turned out, my hopes were fulfilled – and much more.

Owen's green Explorer shirt disappeared the next morning. Instead, Owen appeared as a voyageur wearing a buckskin shirt and leggings. The voyageur clothes smelled horrible, but the stench somehow added to the sense of adventure.

The crew got a slow start, and after a few hours of paddling, we crossed into Canada at Prairie Portage. As the crew started onto Basswood, we were hit by heavy winds. None of us were very good paddlers, and we struggled. We took a break on an island where Owen and a crew member laid out the lunch: lunch meat and cheese on smashed bread and deep red bug juice.

After lunch, we paddled to our first night's camping spot on North Bay. The paddling conditions the next day were grim, and we crossed our first real portages in knee-deep moose muck. By the time we got to Isabella and made camp, the crew was bedraggled, and morale needed a serious boost.

Owen knew exactly what to do: using a reflector oven, Owen baked pizza which was the best looking and best-tasting pizza I have ever seen or tasted. Owen's pizza restored the morale of the crew. It was at this time that I began to believe that Owen was something special and we were going to have a great voyage.

Owen's stock continued to rise the next morning when he and the crew leader produced a huge breakfast of large, intact pancakes, syrup, and cocoa. There might have been bacon, too.

When we left Isabella that morning, we were a real crew. Morale was high, we had become better paddlers, and we knew we had the best Guide. From Isabella, our goal was to get to Darky and take a layover day.

At Darky our advisor broke his arm and had to be paddled by Owen back to base to have the arm set. This left nine of us, aged 14-17, alone in the Quetico. Before leaving, Owen instructed us in the route to

travel and where we would rendezvous: the campsite at river right at the base of Lower Basswood Falls.

Our crew never considered our situation to be unusual. We kept paddling and portaging, following Owen's instructions. We arrived at lower Basswood Falls and claimed the campsite Owen wanted.

Owen wasn't there, so we ran the falls in our canoes. In the beginning, we mostly capsized, but we quickly learned that the best technique was to paddle like crazy through the falls. When we paddled like crazy, we mostly ran the falls without capsizing.

Owen and our advisor arrived in the middle of the afternoon. Owen gave us a lecture that running whitewater was forbidden, and we were not to mention it in base.

That night the campfire was the most memorable campfire in my life. Owen smelled worse than ever (he had not taken the opportunity to shower in base camp), and he got on a roll telling stories that might have had a kernel of truth or not. He had us on the ground laughing.

Upon return to base, Owen reverted to wearing his green Explorer shirt. When we left early the next morning, Owen was there, waving us off. That was my last image of Owen, or so I thought.

After my canoe voyage, I did two Philmont Treks. My memories from those Treks do not include Rangers (Philmont guides). I measured the Rangers (probably unfairly) against the standard set by Owen, and against that standard, I don't remember them.

Forty years after my 1967 voyage, I returned to the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base to help launch the Exchange Program between the Philmont Staff Association and the SAA. Owen was there, and someone introduced us. I shared my memories of the 1967 voyage of Crew 703-C. Owen could not remember the pizza at Isabella, the advisor breaking his arm, our whitewater adventures, or the campfire at Lower Basswood Falls. In fact, he could not remember our crew at all. This was OK, because what mattered was that I still had the memories of the canoe voyage and Owen's role in making those memories.

I last saw Owen three years ago in Ely. Neither then, nor at our previous encounter at the SAA reunion, did I tell Owen that the canoe voyage changed my life. Owen had no memories of the voyage, so I did not think he would understand. I was probably wrong.

The news of his death gave me a great sense of loss: the most significant person in my life-changing adventure as a young man was gone. Two of my crewmates had previously died, and Owen's death made the circle of Crew 703-C significantly smaller.

Changes to seasonal staff academic scholarship program

By Vern Miller

This year we are introducing a change to the seasonal academic scholarship program recently approved by the board of directors.

Aside from supporting our seasonal staff by encouraging their continued education, we also use the program as an opportunity to incentivize staff to return. Returning staff brings experience that supports a better program for participants.

For this reason, we are adding a new component to the scholarship program. We are allowing first-year staff members to apply for a scholarship. If awarded, they will receive the scholarship upon successful

completion of their second year on staff.

They will also be eligible to apply as a second-year staff member. Meaning they are potentially eligible for a \$2,000 scholarship award after their second year. We hope this will increase the retention of first-year seasonal staff. Their contributions will be valuable in training new staff and providing more experienced individuals for Northern Tier program participants.

You can learn more about the scholarship program at holry.org/programs/scholarships.

Calendar of events

Northern Tier / Sommers Alumni Reunion

August 20 – 22, 2021

Northern Tier High Adventure, Ely, MN

Annual Business Meeting of Voting Members

August 21, 2021

Northern Tier High Adventure, Ely, MN

Canoecopia and Alumni Dinner

March 13 – March 15, 2022

Madison, WI

For further information visit holry.org

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Images from 2021 Red Renner memorial work week

