

**Name of Award:** Hiram M. Chittenden Award for Interpretative Excellence

**Name of Nominee:** Shawna Polen

**Position, Title, Series, and Grade:**

Natural Resource Specialist  
Park Ranger  
GS-0401-09

**Organization, Location, and Mailing Address:**

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## Hiram M. Chittenden Award for Interpretive Excellence Shawna Polen Canton Lake

The Canton Lake office, along with the Tulsa District Office, and the Tulsa District Innovations Team would like to nominate our outstanding Park Ranger Shawna Polen for the 2018 Hiram M. Chittenden Award for Interpretive Excellence. Since Shawna's arrival at Canton Lake she has worked diligently to bring much needed interpretation, innovation, creativity, and teamwork to both Canton Lake Office and the Tulsa District's interpretative outreach program. With limited staffing throughout the district, Canton Lake is no exception with only two park rangers. Along with most of the District, park rangers have very little time and resources to pour into any interpretation outside of water safety. Through her determination and desire to provide interpretive resources to the public, Shawna has been able to continually assist with the interpretation of our Water Safety mission, and has gone above and beyond her normal job duties that include the full range of visitor assistance and natural resource management activities. She has created and presented several custom environmental interpretive programs of her own and worked with local groups and municipalities in order to offer more recreational experiences for Canton Lake's visitors.

In an area of the country where interpretation is found lacking in the Corps, Park Rangers like Shawna are rare. Her ability to interpret on almost any subject to almost any crowd, along with the creativity and effort that she puts into each experience, translates into a very positive experience for our park visitors. With a small visitor center in the Park Office, Shawna has already drafted plans to make the space a more interactive experience. For National Public Lands Day, Shawna capped the night off presenting her own Bat Program that she designed and presented at the Canton Lake Amphitheater complete with a bat costume she made herself.



*Ranger Polen presenting her Bat program*



Shawna has also invested in events outside the Lake Office including manning water safety booths at large events such as Enid KNID Outdoor Expo, the ODCW Expo, and the Walleye Rodeo which reaches large diverse crowd. She has presented water safety programs to various schools, created a Corps of Engineers Float for the Walleye Rodeo Parade, and wrote numerous newspaper articles for Canton area newspapers focusing on natural resources and water safety.

Among her full range of duties, she also serves as Canton Lake's Volunteer Coordinator. She runs a very successful volunteer program and she is quick to selflessly nominate her awesome volunteers for district and national awards including Volunteer of the Year Award, Enduring Service Award, and the Corps Foundations Volunteer Excellence Coin. Both in 2016 and 2017 her volunteers were selected as runners up to the National Volunteer of the Year award, and received both Division and District Volunteer of the year award honors.



*Ranger Polen presenting award to her volunteers.*

In her visitor assistance duties Shawna noticed a language barrier and a need to bridge that gap. Shawna took it upon herself to create both a video series and field guides for park rangers demonstrating common phrases in Spanish and in Sign Language for Park Rangers to use as a communication tool while providing visitors assistance.

In 2016 the Tulsa District created and established their own Innovations Team. Ranger Polen was selected to be part of this team due to her passion for interpretation, positive attitude, and ability to work as an effective team member. At the very first Innovations Summit, Shawna stepped up and volunteered to present her innovative idea for the Jr. Park Ranger App. The team chose to make her idea one of the three Innovations to work on for the 2016-2017 season. Shawna was named Team Lead for the Jr. Ranger

App subteam and instantly got to work developing a plan, storyboards, games, and working with teammates to animate characters and artwork. She created “Ranger Eagleton” who would be the new face of the Jr. Ranger App and the new face of Interpretation. With the help of her subteam, Ranger Eagleton has been through many drafts to get to the clean looking character we have today.



*Ranger Polen with SWOSU.  
Software Engineering Students.*

When faced with new challenges in App development, Shawna did not abandon the innovation nor give up. During the FY 17 season, Shawna was asked to speak at the NRM Rangers Conference on her team’s interpretive app. The App along with several buttons featuring “Ranger Eagleton” made with her own resources were very popular among attendees. With all the preparation for the NRM National NRM Workshop as main session speakers, time got away from the team for that season and were not able to launch their Innovations.

The Jr. Ranger App was continued into the FY 18 season when Shawna took it upon herself to look outside for partner help. She contacted Southwestern Oklahoma State University and was able to reach their software engineering professors who needed real life projects for their graduating seniors to work on. From that, a prosperous partnership has grown between the Corps and Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She also reached out to The Corps Foundation for help in finding partners and sponsors to assist in the Jr. Ranger App program to provide the plastic badges to give each child that completes the Canton Lake journey on the App. Due to her tireless efforts, this innovation will give visitors an idea what the park rangers would like to demonstrate to visitors but do not have time, an interactive interpretation of the natural resources around the lake. Her efforts in this are a great example of what can be accomplished through partnerships and will power to provide interpretation to the public. Through these partnerships, neither the District nor the Lake Office has incurred any financial costs for this innovative resource.



*Ranger Eagleton*



*All artwork for the Jr. Ranger App had to be completed in house by Ranger Polen and her Innovations Subteam*

Shawna also saw the need to get the word out and boost the Jr. Ranger App program. When opportunity presented itself, Shawna took advantage and wrote an article for the Jr. Ranger App for InterpNEWS, a world-wide interpretive journal/magazine. This article was published in the Spring 2018 edition. She has also written storyboards for the District Commander on the University Partnership and the Jr. Ranger App along with working with PAO to create Facebook page updates to get the word out about the upcoming App to launch this summer.

Shawna's efforts go far beyond her own subteam. She also got involved in our Self Service Campground subteam by creating the interpretive signage for the campgrounds and writing the first draft of the District SOP for the innovation. She also convinced her lake management to get involved with this innovation to create "A New Way to Pay" opportunity for the visiting public at Canton Lake.

Shawna is both an asset to the Canton Lake Project and the Tulsa District. Due to her leadership, creativity, and her continuous passion to deliver interpretation on any platform, we believe that she clearly deserves recognition as a candidate of the 2018 Hiram M. Chittenden Award for Interpretive Excellence.

### **Citation:**

Shawna Polen has set high standards of Interpretation, Leadership, and Teamwork as a Park Ranger in the Tulsa District. As a Park Ranger at Canton Lake, she has sparked new and creative ways to enhance interpretation for the recreating public that have traveled across the district. Shawna creates a fun, safe, and educational environment for visitors of all ages promoting the Corps Mission, Water Safety, Environmental Education, and reaches out to embrace new technology to get her interpretive messages across to all visitors. Shawna is a credit to both the Canton Lake Office and the Tulsa District Office, and a highly valued member of the Tulsa District Innovations Team. She thoroughly demonstrates exceptional commitment, Corps values and leadership ability, making her highly deserving of this recognition.