

# **Hiram H. Chittenden Award for Interpretive Excellence**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Karla J. Zeutenhorst**

It's been said that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wears "white hats" at the Gavins Point Project. If that's true, Karla is a big part of why we do. She is a consummate supporter of Gavins Point and the USACE, putting her work and loyalties to action in innovative and inclusive ways. She very effectively recruits and employs volunteers to operate the Class A, Lewis and Clark Visitor Center at a very high level.

While good interpretation can help inform an audience, great interpretation can help shape their perception. Early last year the project office and our state partners needed to conduct a fishery renovation project on a Corps owned, state managed recreational lake. Over the years and due to severe flooding in 2011 the once vibrant sport fishery had been reduced due to the proliferation of non-sport "rough" fish and the introduction of invasive carp species. Karla foresaw that a fisheries renovation project might leave some visitors and local stakeholders concerned, especially considering it required a significant lowering of the lake and a chemical pesticide that would result in an unsightly fish kill. Karla viewed the challenge as an opportunity to tell the story of our agency's natural resource management missions. By leading the effort to develop an informative brochure Karla was able provide the project office staff with a tool that ultimately helped gain public and stakeholder support for the effort.

On her own initiative Karla began researching the agency's role during the Civil Defense efforts in the 1960s. Karla gathered the materials and created a display showcasing the Corps' role during this time and provided programs in the Lewis and Clark Visitor Center. She reached out to the community and acquired the artifacts as gifts and loans. Not to be stopped by limited recreational budgets, Karla found and helped obtain grant dollars to fill the financial gaps. She prepared the narrative and organized the display, and the result was fantastic. Aside from being very thorough and interesting it has really helped the public understand just how broad our agency's missions are and how we support the nation no matter the challenges it faces.

Karla supports all Gavins Point business lines and found a way to offer powerplant tours in 2014 despite a high level of construction activity in the plant. She was a leading/active participant in 11 different sports shows and environmental events. Karla originated dozens of press releases to keep the public informed of changing conditions due to construction. Our Bald Eagle Days brought over 1000 visitors to the Visitor Center on a January weekend showing strong support for the event.

None of these examples give the complete picture of Karla. Envision an energetic, knowledgeable, and positive person who is determined to tell the USACE and Gavins Point stories. Doing this in a superb fashion, she continues to tell the stories while building support for what we do. In the words of our Omaha District Chief of Public Affairs Maggie Oldham, Karla is an "absolute champion when it comes to helping tell our story effectively".