

Memories of Our Friend Ardis Smith

By Betsy Orselet



As you may know, long time Vermont Senior Games advocate Ardis Smith passed away on April 9th. Ardis spent her entire life working in the recreation field with people of all ages from the very young to the very old. She gave tirelessly of herself to help others find ways to live more healthy and meaningful lives.

Ardis Smith has a long history of leadership in the Vermont recreation scene. From 1972-74, Ardis served as President of the Vermont Recreation and Parks Association. From 1987-1992, she served as President of the Green Mountain Senior Games and she served as Coordinator of the State Games for many, many years, a role she continued to play last September at the age of eighty-nine.

It is often said that at the end of the day, it is the relationships you have established that far outweigh any professional accomplishments. Ardis Smith was the face of the Green Mountain Senior Games from the very beginning of the organization and for the next twenty eight years. She left many wonderful impressions and memories with the people she worked and played with over these years. Some of them are expressed below:

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“Ardis was ‘One in a Million!’ Although small in stature, she was a giant in all her endeavors. While I was president of Green Mountain Senior Games for six and one half years, she was always there, as close as an e-mail or phone call to discuss our plans and problems. Her perspective of the past and vision for the future were outstanding. I recall her telling me about when she was just a girl helping her father put chains on the family car to get up that steep Weston hill on a cold, snowy, winter day. That was Ardis! She always found a way to get up what-ever hill she faced, wherever it was, regardless of how many projects she was juggling.

She resisted the computer age, liking a hard copy of messages from the National Senior Games Association office or anyone else. She liked the pace of past state senior games, when there was time to sit and visit with seniors who showed up to participate. She longed for opening ceremonies at all-state games to be smooth and well attended. She will be looking down with appreciation when that finally happens.

Ardis was a wonderful friend. I will always have the greatest admiration and respect for her determination and organizing skills. Ardis was one of those unforgettable people who you meet in your life’s journey.”

*From John Pelton,
Past-President of the Green Mountain Senior Games*

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"I met Ardis in 1978 when I first started teaching at Green Mountain College in Poultney VT. I was very active in the VT Recreation and Parks Association (VRPA) at the time and would interact with Ardis at the various meetings and workshops. I always found her to be very professional and willing to speak her mind. Ardis was a great asset to my learning curve regarding small town politics. My true involvement with Ardis came with the establishment of the Green Mountain Senior Games. We both served on the original steering committee and worked very closely during the initial years of the games. Ardis was a tremendous advocate of the games. She had a passion for making sure that the games were a success and highly participated in by all Vermont seniors. She was an excellent ambassador for the games and served as the official spokesperson during those early years. She was always prepared and willing to put in the long hours that were needed to conduct the games. Ardis served as a professional role model for many of the Green Mountain College students who served as the volunteer leaders of the games. She was truly an inspiration to all of us, given her enthusiasm and dedication to the profession."

From Bob Riley, former professor of therapeutic recreation at Green Mountain College and past president of VRPA.

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"I had the privilege of working with Ardis on the Green Mountain Senior Games every September for the 15 years I taught at Green Mountain College. The experiences our students were given in helping with the games when they were held on that campus were 'priceless!' And I personally will always cherish the memories I hold of those times. She was an amazing lady!"

From Carol Hartshorn, Retired Professor

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"The things that stand out for me about Ardis are her commitment to the games, her willingness to help whenever needed, and the amount of time she put in...I'm sort of taking on part of her job now and I'm swamped! I will honor her memory by carrying out her enthusiasm for the Vermont Senior Games."

*From Barbara Jordan,
Current Sports Coordinator for the VT Senior Games*

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"I've had the pleasure to work with Ardis Smith ever since I got involved with the Vermont Senior Games in 1990. No matter what time of day or evening I called, she was always available to answer my questions. Ardis will always be remembered for handling the many events for the Vermont Senior Games, almost by herself at times. I will forever remember Ardis as my inspiration to keep going in sports and fitness no matter what age I am. Ardis will be dearly missed by all who had the privilege of working with her."

*From Flo Meiler,
20+ years Senior Games athlete*

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“Ardis was an amazing woman. Most of us around today only knew her for her untiring work in organizing the Green Mountain Senior Games for so many years. I was fortunate enough to know her when she was the Recreation Director at the Brattleboro Retreat back in the 1960’s and I would visit her there during my trips to southern Vermont when I was the Recreation Field Advisor for the Vermont Board of Recreation. Ardis was somewhat of a pioneer in the therapeutic recreation movement even before it was called that.

As a young professional she was then and remained until the very end an unusually energetic person, highly opinionated about how things should be done, always interested in going to national meetings to make contacts and make her presence known, willing to do all of the work from the most boring and routine to the most demanding. Witty and quick spoken, she was always fun to be with in a meeting; no meeting she was involved in ever lasted very long because she always had to move on to something else.

The truly amazing thing about Ardis was that she remained so intensely involved in the recreation field after her retirement. Most of us move on to other things, but she stayed with it not only in the senior games but in other activities as well. She was a square dance caller for a number of years, she coordinated the senior meals program for a region of southern Vermont, and she led social recreation activities for senior centers in the area.

Ardis was always particularly devoted to seeing that other people were properly recognized for their contributions. There must be dozens of people in Vermont who have an award hanging on their wall or in their file cabinet that was the result of Ardis’ caring.”

*From George Plumb,
Past President of the Green Mountain Senior Games
and the Vermont Recreation and Parks Association*

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This collection of comments describes a life well lived. Thank you to all the contributors. A celebration of Ardis’ life will be held on Saturday, May 21 at 11 a.m. at the Old Parish Church in Weston, Vt. A reception will be held following at the Weston Playhouse. We look forward to seeing some of her Senior Games friends there and hearing more stories about good times spent with Ardis.☒