

# Meet the heart and soul of ADK volunteers

*From the Board of Directors to the volunteer trail crew, ADK is volunteer-based. Let us introduce you to a representative sample, and through them, to some of ADK's many volunteer programs.*

**Bill Coffin**, *Trails Committee*  
**Mary Coffin**, *Extended/Seasonal Outings and Adventure Travel Program*

Bill and Mary Coffin, ADK members for forty-one and twenty-nine years respectively, have served in a number of volunteer positions at ADK. "When we were on the ADK board," they explain, "we both wanted to be active, participating board members, so we joined committees. We are both drawn to any outdoor activity: trail work, hiking, camping, canoeing, skiing..." The Coffins have focused much of their efforts on the ADK Trails and Extended Outings programs, though they are also active as trip and trail work leaders on the chapter level (they are members of the Onondaga Chapter).



Bill served on the ADK Trails Committee for twenty years, chairing the committee for three, and while he has since "retired" from that committee, he and Mary can still be seen at many Trails activities, such as ADK National Trail Day events and trail maintenance activities in the Pigeon Lake Wilderness. "Currently," they say, "we have been GPSing the North Country National Scenic Route in the Adirondacks, focusing on the bushwhacks that connect existing trails."

Mary, meanwhile, has served on the ADK Extended Outings Committee for twenty-three years. Once a year she leads an Adventure Travel trip (this year it's a canoeing and hiking trip to the Missouri River) and, among other things, she has chaired the ADK Winter Outing

Committee several times—as has Bill, she adds. "I enjoy taking people to new places and observing their enjoyment of the adventure," Mary says.

When asked why they volunteer, what they enjoy about being ADK members, or what they like best about the activities they've volunteered for, the answer is essentially the same: "People. We both especially like the camaraderie that develops as people interact, whether it is on a trail work event or a camping, hiking or canoe trip. We have met so many wonderful people, and made so many lasting friends through ADK."

—Lisa Metzger

**Tom Wemett**, *National Trails Day*

National Trails Day—a registered trademark—was launched in 1993 by the American Hiking Society in conjunction with other public and private parties. "NTD" is held annually on the first Saturday of June. The idea is to raise awareness of our nation's trails and to get people outdoors in celebration and, often, stewardship activities. ADK, like many other hiking groups, has sponsored hikes, trail activities, and local clean-ups (often on a chapter level) on NTD since day one.

Tom Wemett, who joined the Genesee Chapter of ADK about ten years ago, has participated in ADK-sponsored NTD events for five years. "Mother Nature tries her best to hide the trail underneath mud, downed trees, and brush," Wemett says. "Beavers try their best to bury the trail under water. It takes many hours of planning and labor to develop and maintain trails. I'm one who enjoys the challenge and opportunity, knowing that I'm making someone else's hiking experience more enjoyable."

"I love trail work," Wemett continues. "But more importantly, National Trails Day has given me an opportunity to experience trails in other [places than I'm used to]. We've been in Inlet, Cranberry Lake, Blue Mt. Lake, the Catskills. I probably wouldn't have visited these areas except for the National Trails Day event. I'm looking forward to the 2011 National Trails Day returning to Inlet."

Wemett is an active member of ADK's Trail Committee and, as a self-described "big fan" of the Northville-Placid



Trail, chairs the Northville–Placid Trail Subcommittee. He is also web master of the newly created [www.nptrail.org](http://www.nptrail.org), “which is devoted to all things NP Trail,” he explains.

“I love the fact that all across the United States,” he says, “tens of thousands of people are outdoors working on trails in their communities on the same day, interacting with other like-minded people in celebration of trails.”

—Lisa Metzger

### **Bob Goodwin, Jack of all Trades**

ADK attracts people who see a problem as an opportunity to make the organization better. Glens Falls-Saratoga Chapter member Bob Goodwin is one of those who do many different vital things for ADK, often quietly and behind the scenes.

Members of the board of directors have known of his exemplary work as the chair of the Investment Committee, but regular members see the results only in the annual report or when they get to enjoy the beautiful new bathrooms in the Loj, made possible by ADK’s strong financial position. And, Goodwin gets to sign some of those checks for new supplies as a member of the Finance Committee.

But formal committee work is only the beginning of Goodwin’s resume. Noticing that digital photography



was rapidly supplanting traditional film, Goodwin decided to create a digital picture library, accessible to anyone at ADK for use in articles, on the Web site, in reports and fundraising letters, or anywhere.

Updating parts of the Web site was another natural fit for Goodwin, which led him to realize that numerous e-mail inquiries were arriving every day and going unanswered. Another problem to be solved, and Goodwin started arriving at the Lake George Member Services Center regularly to help folks figure out where to go, how to get there, what information they needed, and how to do it all safely.

Most recently, he noticed that ADK’s retirement plan

for employees was not up to snuff—you guessed it, he set out to research various options, made detailed reports to senior staff, and then organized the transfer to a new program.

What does Goodwin get back? He said, “I like to work with ADK’s dedicated Members Services Center staff. Many have become personal friends, and they treat me like one of them. I get to enjoy their company about two days a week.”

Like many ADK members, Goodwin feels a sense of accomplishment. “The best thing about being an ADK member is to be part of a great collaboration among our staff and volunteers to protect New York’s amazing lands and waters for the benefit of all citizens,” he says.

—John J. Kettlewell

### **Ernie Bauer, Campground Host Program**

ADK’s Wilderness Campground is adjacent to Adirondak Loj at Heart Lake. The campground offers campsites, lean-tos, a couple of cabins, and canvas cabins that—as described on the ADK Web site, always sound tempting to me—are “cozy, walled tents on wooden platforms, accommodating six people in three bunk beds with mattresses.”

To make people feel welcome and comfortable, ADK tries to have a campground host available to greet and assist campers and explain the rules. Ernie Bauer, who, with his wife, has been active with ADK for forty-four years and a member for about thirty, has served as the campground host coordinator. “We had used the campsites numerous times,” Bauer says, “and in 2001 I was asked to become the host coordinator. I served in that position for about seven years. During that time the program [which was started in 1995] became more formalized and participation increased.”

Want to be a host? Hosts are selected on a first-come, first-served basis and must be at least twenty-one years old. The ideal host will have camping experience, as well as experience with the public. I think it’s safe to assume



*“In all of the six-million-acre Adirondack Park, there*

that Bauer would have approached the host position with the same warmth and congeniality that he exhibited in our phone conversation.

“Ellen and I greatly enjoy the time we spend at ADK and working with the volunteer groups, which we consider family,” says Bauer, a member of the Glens Falls–Saratoga Chapter. “The accomplishments provide great personal satisfaction. The great thing about being an ADK member is the opportunity to participate in numerous activities and to be with this great group of people.

“I have found that in life, you get more back by giving freely,” he adds.

—Lisa Metzger

### **Jae Lyn Burke, Johns Brook Lodge Work Days**

“I’ve loved JBL since patrolling the High Peaks as an ADK Ridge Runner in the 1970s,” says Jae Lyn Burke. “When I wanted to ‘give back,’ I contacted Bob Grimm, chair of the JBL Committee, and he presented me the opportunity to get awfully muddy and really happy.” Johns Brook Lodge Work Day volunteers do everything from repairing the infrastructure and improving the grounds to hauling in supplies for the summer season.

She is quick to point out that when notified of her nomination as a representative JBL volunteer, “the appropriate response was ‘why me?’ because there is a large cadre of extraordinarily dedicated volunteers. Of late, the place has been transformed by them.

“The back country gives all of us many gifts,” says Burke, “and I find the better part of myself in the woods. ADK, and certainly our properties, can be integral to that experience. I realize I can respond by doing my share at work weekends or serving as a winter host, all while putting my muscles to use at new skills.

“In all of the six-million-acre Adirondack Park,” Burke points out, “there is but a single hike-in hut—our Johns Brook Lodge. I can’t afford a brookside lean-to, let alone a Camp Grace or O’Brien, but as an ADK member I have ownership in these treasures. We all do.”

Burke and her partner live on thirty-two acres in the Sentinel Range near Wilmington. They enjoy paddling and have sled dogs, and she is a physician assistant and licensed guide. They belong to the Hurricane Chapter of ADK; Burke joined the club in 1969.

“I call JBL my second home,” Burke says. “I always arrive filled with joy and leave with some regret.”

—Neal Burdick



GAIL OPANFOSKE

## *is but a single hike-in hut—our Johns Brook Lodge.”*

### **John Golenski, Loj Work Weekends**

Adirondak Loj is an old and much-used building. Consequently, it's in much need of loving care, whether it's wiring, plumbing, roofing, carpentry, or any number of skills. A lot of that care is provided by club volunteers, who donate their time and talents (and sometimes bloody knuckles) on twice-yearly Work Weekends.

One of the veterans of this work is John Golenski, who has been an ADK member for about thirty-five years and a Loj Work Weekend volunteer since 1988, and who has participated at least once a year ever since.

"I learned of the club after finding the Loj on a trip to the Adirondacks in the mid '70s," Golenski says. "Ten years later I moved to Rockland County and became a member of the Ramapo Chapter (now the North Jersey Ramapo Chapter). At that time, Ted Asch was in that chapter and he organized the Work Weekend. It was attended by many of the Ramapo members.

"I'm one of the last remaining people from the Ted Asch days," Golenski notes. "The volunteers back then were sometimes called Asch's Army," he recalls.

"I like the Adirondacks and the location of the Loj," Golenski observes. "It truly is 'the finest square mile.' I'm also interested in the history of the area and the Lake Placid Club. The Loj is an interesting link to the whole thing and I like participating in its further development. It's what otherwise would be a rare opportunity to get into the workings of the Loj."

And what does he like most about it? "Meeting with people once or twice a year for a common purpose is very enjoyable because you don't get to know anyone well enough to make enemies," he points out. "The work of the moment is a very good bond."

—Neal Burdick



### **Frank Sorbero, Johns Brook Lodge Winter Host Program**

ADK's two lodges are different. There's someone at Adirondak Loj all the time, but Johns Brook Lodge is staffed for only about two months in the summer. How to encourage people to visit the rest of the year?

This was the impetus behind the Winter Host Program, which places a volunteer in the Johns Brook Valley in the off-season, not to operate the lodge—volunteers stay in the cabin the summer JBL crew uses, the Henry L. Young Cabin, Friday through Sunday in winter—but to provide services, advice, and assistance to the public.

That's more or less how Frank Sorbero defines the job. Sorbero has been involved in the "WHP" since 1986, when Rich Casler, who was JBL Committee chair at the time, "asked me and some other winter climbers to volunteer for the program," he says. "It sounded like a great idea. I was climbing the Winter 46 at the time." Sorbero took over as program chair in 2000. He also serves on the JBL Committee.

Sorbero cites several reasons for why he likes the program:

- "Staying in a heated cabin and aiding the public, and being a 'resident' of the North Country for a short period of time as a representative of ADK."
- "I really love the Johns Brook Valley area."
- "It gives me an opportunity to give back to the High Peaks, ADK, and the hiking community, and to get outside in winter."
- "In addition to camaraderie, participation, and contribution to the program and its services, educating people about the winter use of the wilderness, and ADK, is a great satisfaction to me. This way I can be part of the solution and not part of the problem."
- "I have met many lifelong friends and hiking companions over the years and honed the skills needed to participate in outdoor recreation."

Sorbero, a native of Amsterdam, N.Y., recently moved to Glenfield, in the Black River Valley, where he lives with his wife, Pam, and sons Richie and Jon and works as a registered nurse. He started hiking in 1979 and joined ADK in 1981. A member of the Iroquois Chapter and a 46er, he also enjoys hunting and fly fishing.

—Neal Burdick



*I am convinced that those of us who live in or near the Adirondacks will find a lot of satisfaction in participating in the Adopt a Lean-to Program. There is a lot of satisfaction in participating in the Adopt a Lean-to Program.*

**John Schneider, Adopt a Lean-to Program**

Staying in an Adirondack lean-to is an often memorable experience—sometimes for the wrong reasons. Many of us have spent a long night trying to discourage vicious mice and other rodents from ventilating our packs, only to have them scurry across our faces after we've finally fallen asleep. You can thank the poor domestic habits of previous inhabitants who left behind food scraps and trash. And when the call of nature comes after dawn, we stagger to a rickety privy that occasionally seems to be missing some vital part, like the front door or the seat—often the victim of a poorly equipped winter camping party in need of dry fuel for their fire.



What a joy, then, to come across a swept and clean lean-to, with a fire pit all ready for the night and a privy that doesn't cause you to wish you had decided to camp a few miles earlier. Have you ever wondered how this comes to be and who is responsible for these Hiltons in

the wilderness? Since 1991, you could have been thanking John Schneider, the volunteer head of ADK's Adopt a Lean-to Program.

Schneider explains: "In 1991 I was a member of the ADK Trails Committee. Committee chair Jim Cooper needed to replace Don Burness, who was retiring as Adopt a Lean-to coordinator. I agreed, sensing that I could contribute to the program and use my computer skills to grow the program beyond the 98 lean-tos then in the program. I had been hiking in the Adirondacks since 1976 and felt it was time to give something back to the woods. I did not believe that this would become a twenty-year endeavor, and that I would enjoy every year of it."

Schneider helped grow the program to where it is today, with around 170 volunteers adopting 150 lean-tos in recent years. And, he got a lot of satisfaction for his hard work. "I gain a good sense of accomplishment when I see the results of my work," he says. "However, it is especially pleasing when passing hikers stop to ask why you are doing what you are doing, you tell them, and then they add, 'Thanks for your work' or 'Keep up the good work.' A few times some of them even asked how they could become involved," he notes.

With his retirement in 2010 from his tireless work on lean-tos, Schneider can look back and reflect on a program that touches virtually every hiker in the Adirondacks.

For more information on Adopt a Lean-to, see p. 18 or contact Hilary Moynihan, [hilary@adk.org](mailto:hilary@adk.org).

—John J. Kettlewell

**Bill Ingersoll, Adopt a Wildland Program**

"The Adopt a Wildland program can be an abstract concept that is hard to explain to some people," says Bill Ingersoll, who chaired the program from 2003 to 2010. "By 'adopting' a part of the Adirondacks you are not taking any proprietary interest in anything, but at its best, the program has the potential to foster critical thinking about land management goals and recreational impacts. The program is open-ended and proactive individuals are free to implement projects that engage them."

"Projects" adopters can consider range from exploring the adopted area and reporting on trail conditions, to cleaning up dumpsites or litter where necessary, to getting involved in Unit Management Plans. Ingersoll says, "I adopted an area of my own, the Black River Wild Forest, as a way to lead by example. I still fulfill my responsibilities by leading chapter outings to my area, exploring it individually, and making it a point to be ADK's field

become the park's best stewards as state resources are diverted elsewhere.  
work to be done!



expert on this little-known corner of the park. A few years ago I initiated a process that may eventually see the core area reclassified as Wilderness—and if that were to become realized, I would truly feel that I had made an impact.”

Ingersoll, who has been a member of the Iroquois Chapter since 1999, has served on the Conservation Committee for the last eight years and volunteers in a number of capacities. Why? “I gladly do it all because the Adirondack wilderness is a major part of my identity,” he explains, “and I feel a strong need to share my experiences with others. Furthermore, I am convinced that those of us who live in or near the Adirondacks will become the park’s best stewards as state resources are diverted elsewhere. There is a lot of work to be done!”

“I appreciate the fact that ADK is not just an organization that takes your membership money and gives you in return a glossy brochure overstating what they did with it,” Ingersoll continues. “This is very much a member-driven organization, and if you don’t like the way something is being done, then it’s not that hard to get involved in your chapter or in one of the committees—be proactive and effect a change! And yeah,” he adds, “I’ve met a few friends through ADK, too.”

—Lisa Metzger

### Ruth Kuhfahl, Adopt a Trail Program

Ruth Kuhfahl, currently a resident of Keene Valley, joined the Niagara Frontier Chapter in 1973. She quickly volunteered to work on their twenty-five-mile section of the Finger Lakes Trail, and eventually became the chapter’s trails chair, serving until her retirement in 1988. “I needed a new structure in my life, and going out every weekend to be helpful and to enjoy nature was a winner,” she says. “I became hooked on trail work for the next thirty-seven years—and counting.”

Kuhfahl has volunteered for six Sierra Club Trail Maintenance Weeks, from Maine to Washington state “and in between,” and one American Hiking Society Trail Work Week in the Virgin Islands. But it is with ADK’s Adopt a Trail program, which encourages volunteers to take responsibility for a trail or trail segment, where she has really put in some serious time. Saying the thing she likes best is “the collegiality of like-minded folks,” she checks off her activities:

- \*Six ADK trail crews out of Adirondack Loj, 1989–95.
- \*Leader of Ruth’s Easy Project, designed to encourage first-timers or seniors to try trail work. 1994–2008. “Had some wonderful folks over the years!”
- \*Since 1990, work on the Crows trail network through the Hurricane Chapter, continuing as trails chair “involved with crew organization, though not always with hands-on maintenance any longer.”
- \*For several years, responsible for the Saginaw Bay trail



between Upper Saranac Lake and Weller Pond during a week’s camping trip there each summer, and for the Beede Road section of the Baxter Mt. Trail in Keene Valley; “I have recently turned both of these back to the adoption pool,” she says.

—Neal Burdick