

August 28, 2007

Phyllis Green, Superintendent
Isle Royale National Park
800 East Lakeshore Drive
Houghton, MI 49931

Dear Superintendent Green

The purpose of this letter is to tell you of the outstanding performance of some of the National Park Service personnel assigned to Windigo Ranger Station.

On August 20, 2007, Enar S. Strom died in his cabin on Barnum Island. When his wife discovered him on the floor in their kitchen, she immediately called me on marine radio. At the same time, she called Windigo Ranger Station and asked for help. My neighbors and I, Jim and Mary Schliep, ran to Strom's cabin and began administering CPR.

Valerie E. Bowen was on the radio that day at Windigo Ranger Station. She immediately made other station personnel aware of the situation, and a boat with emergency personnel and equipment was launched. Throughout the next 2 hours, Valerie functioned as a 'command post', forwarding information, acting as liaison between Barnum Island and other Park locations. She was calm, thorough and extremely helpful, despite being on the fine edge of tears, much like the rest of us.

The boat that was launched (North Gap) was driven by Erin Grivicich. He got the emergency services personnel from Windigo to Barnum Island in record time. Throughout the period of involvement, he provided a calming influence for those of us involved in the operation. He later provided logistical assistance in getting Mr. Strom from Barnum Island to Windigo Ranger Station.

The second person on the North Gap crew was Timothy J. Lutterman. Tim had just recently changed employment status from volunteer to paid employee. Well trained, competent and capable, he relieved those of us providing CPR. He brought the skills needed and applied them rapidly and correctly. He demonstrated excellent knowledge of life saving techniques and worked hard to apply them to the situation at hand. (Wherever his future employment takes him, Tim will no doubt long remember his first week as a Park Service employee.)

Steven A. Martin was the third member of the emergency services crew. (Ironically, Steve had visited with Mr. Strom earlier that afternoon. He'd barely arrived at Windigo before he launched with the North Gap back to Barnum Island). We were extremely relieved to see Steve and his crew come through the door of Strom's kitchen. Steve continued CPR and used the defibrillating machine to attempt to resuscitate Mr. Strom. With Valerie Bowen's help he was in contact with the medical officer, went through all the steps and performed all the procedures which were directed and suggested.

When it became apparent that Mr. Strom was beyond human help, at the medical officer's direction, all efforts were ceased. Steve Martin and Tim Lutterman carefully placed Mr. Strom on a back board, wrapped him securely and at about 1800 CDT, took him back to Windigo.

One of the important principles of management, supervision and good public relations is: keep your people informed. Steve Martin did an excellent job of letting us know what was going on, what was going to happen, and how it would be done. Before he left Barnum Island with Mr. Strom, he spent time carefully explaining what procedures had to be followed, what he was going to do and why it had to be done that way.

Steve Martin returned to Barnum Island at 2030 CDT. He spent nearly an hour with us, detailing what had been accomplished and what was to follow. He'd arranged for Mr. Strom to be brought to Devil Track A/P, MN via U.S. Forest Service aircraft. He detailed the calls he'd made to family members. He secured necessary information from Mrs. Strom for completion of required paperwork, and went to great lengths to answer any questions that we had. After insuring that all was well with each of us, he returned to Windigo.

When the U.S. Forest Service aircraft was unable to land at Windigo, Steve Martin arranged for transportation of Mr. Strom on the North Gap, crewed by Clif Edwards and Trevor Edwards. When that vessel encountered engine problems, the crew pressed on to insure that Mr. Strom arrived in Grand Portage ahead of his spouse. (Sometimes in a period of intense sadness, a moment of levity provides a welcome psychological break. After the Forest Service aircraft cancelled and the NPS vessel broke, Steve Martin commented: "Enar Strom did NOT want to leave Isle Royale!")

We were able to secure passage on August 21 for Mrs. Strom to go back to Grand Portage on the Voyager II. Steve Martin returned to Barnum Island late that morning, passed on further information to all of us, and was on the dock to insure that Mrs. Strom was safely on her way.

This was a sad, frightening and painful episode for everyone concerned. Mr. Strom had been a part of Isle Royale life for many years. He worked as a fisherman on Washington Island, and had been a permanent presence on Barnum Island/Washington Harbor for the last quarter century. He'd become a friend of most all of the Windigo Ranger Station employees over the years. He respected the positions that they held, and the responsibility that went with those positions. He and Mrs. Strom had opened their doors to many of the park employees over the years, for visits, coffee, meals, discussions, and sometimes, overnight stays. It was a point of pride with him that you can maintain a professional relationship and a personal friendship with individuals whose position you respect and whose company you enjoy.

Steve Martin, and the other members of his staff, performed in an outstanding manner during those troubling times. It would have been extremely difficult for those of us on Barnum Island had they not been there. By their actions, they brought great credit to themselves and the National Park Service. I thought you should know that.

Louis D. Schindler
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CC: Steve Martin
Valerie Bowen
Tim Lutterman
Erin Grivicich
Betty Strom