



North Dakota Game and Fish Department game warden, Josh Frey, visits the Fallen Officer Memorial outside the North American Game Warden Museum.

BORDER MEMORIAL

North American Game Warden Museum

Story and Photos by Allison Hesford

Through the windows to the north, the concrete columns of the Peace Tower reach into the sky, but in this building your attention is immediately drawn to the large Kodiak bear that greets you when you walk in the door.

The North American Game Warden Museum, located in the International Peace Garden at the border between North Dakota and Manitoba, Canada, is designed to help people learn more about the individuals who protect wildlife and their natural habitats, and also honors those who have died in the line of duty.

“The museum actually has two functions, one function is to put forward an educational format about

the natural world, its resources and law enforcement’s role,” said Robert Timian, North Dakota Game and Fish Department chief game warden. “The other part is to honor those game wardens across the United States and Canada who have lost their lives in this profession.”

The idea for a museum and education center was first conceived in 1985 or 1986, Timian said, at the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association convention in Winnipeg, Canada. From there it moved into the fund-raising stage. “The North Dakota Game Warden Association, for the first years, was a major fund-raiser, now the funding is more diverse,” he said.

When it came to finding a location for the museum, NAWEOA chose a site that's literally common ground for both Canada and the United States and features beautiful natural surroundings. "They looked at several sites, they decided to establish it at the International Peace Garden because it's already an interface between Canada and the U.S.," Timian said. "NAWEOA also established a separate museum board to oversee the funding, development and operation of the museum."

Because of the shared site between North Dakota and Manitoba, the state and province were both involved with development of the museum. Other jurisdictions were involved as well, but the location allowed North Dakota and Manitoba's game warden associations to be more hands-on.

"Manitoba has been a very good player and a big partner with North Dakota assisting the museum board in getting the museum going, maintaining it and running it," Timian said. "I think it's a good thing for both Manitoba and North Dakota."

Initially the project began with a temporary building at the Peace Garden. In 2004 when fund-raising goals were reached, construction began on the permanent facility. The museum had its first full season of operation starting the summer of 2005.

Today, the museum is running smoothly and continually making improvements. Museum manager Brenda Hevenor has been working to get more exhibits and taxidermy animals. They have also been improving signage of the animals and skins, and finding out background stories.

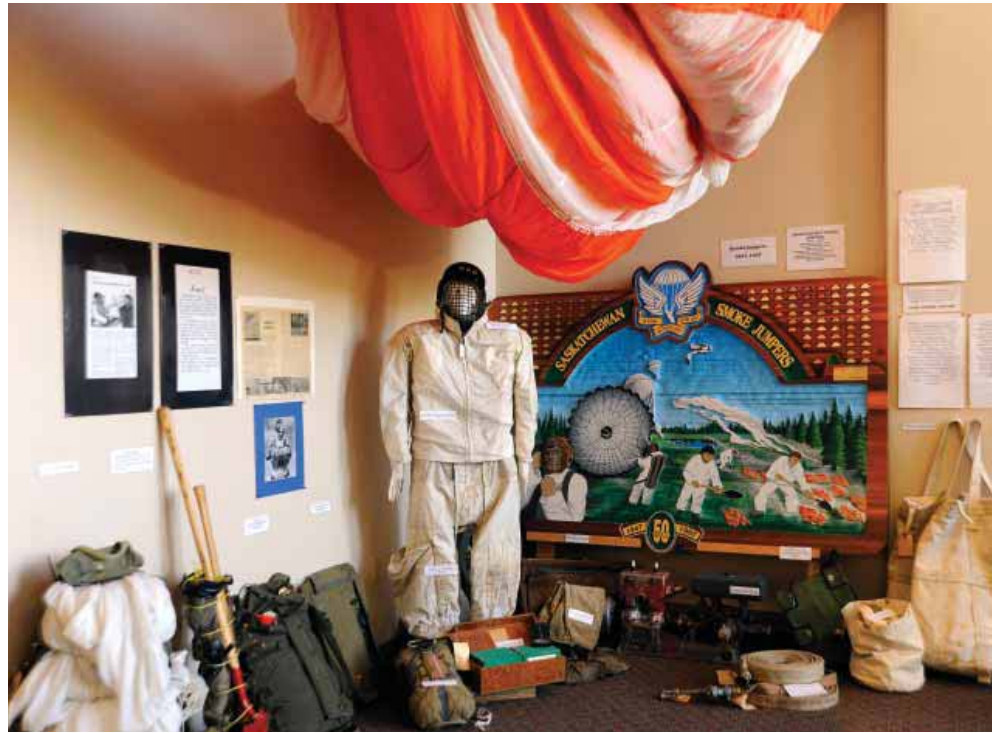
"With each hide or artifact or animal there is a story because the key to this museum, over all other wildlife museums, is everything in here has either been confiscated at the U.S.-Canada border or was killed illegally by poachers," Hevenor said.

For example, the museum's duiker, wildebeest and bushbuck horns, which all originated in Africa, were confiscated because the person in possession did not declare the items when leaving the United States and didn't have permits to bring the items into Canada.

One of the donated taxidermy animals is a well-traveled Kodiak bear that was illegally shot and taken from Kodiak Island, Alaska, to Atlanta, Geor-

gia. From there it traveled to South Africa, back to the United States, and then to Toronto before finally finding its permanent home at the museum. "I think it's really the network of game wardens in North America, they're pretty tight, that these things find their way to the museum," Hevenor said.

The museum also has a rotating display that helps visitors learn more about the different types of work that game wardens do. Last year it was an old game warden office, and currently the display features the history of the Saskatchewan Smoke Jumpers.



This summer the rotating display features the history of the Saskatchewan Smoke Jumpers including their uniform, parachute and equipment.

When Hevenor first came to the museum she had no background on game wardens, but since then she has developed a new appreciation after learning more about their job. Many people think that they are involved mostly with law enforcement, but their jobs cover a much broader spectrum. Officers are involved with conservation efforts, assisting farmers with agriculture and wetlands, and in some jurisdictions they are recruited to fight forest fires, Hevenor said. "They're like handymen."

Coming from the perspective of a game warden, Timian said the museum is about something bigger than just the profession. "It's more than just about game wardens, it's about conservation; the wise use of our natural resources, including game and fish, for sustainable use. And the important role game wardens have in that," he said.

The emotional heart of the museum is the Fallen Officer Memorial, which sits outside the building overlooking Lake Udall. The memorial lists the names of officers from each state and province in North America who lost their lives protecting our natural resources.

"I know that for game wardens it can be a pretty emotional experience when they walk out into the cairns and memorial for the fallen game wardens," Timian said. "I don't think any game warden has stood at the memorial without being personally affected by it. When they see those names on the black marble, especially from their home state, those are people they either personally knew or they know about. There's a connection there."

When people come into the museum, Hevenor mentions the memorial and suggests that they take a look. The memorial, along with the information in the museum, helps to enhance a person's knowledge of the profession and is especially powerful when people see how young some of the officers were when they died. "The ages, they give you a new appreciation for the game war-

den's job because most of them are ages 25 to 50 who have died, and two names were added to Florida and I believe Texas last year. So, it's more dangerous than I think the general public really realizes," Hevenor said.

This year, as an added tribute, the museum will start the Fallen Officers Memorial Ceremony. It will be held September 5 at 1 p.m., and is the first of what will become an annual event at the museum. "It is open to the public; they are notifying all the jurisdictions in North America. It will be the first official memorial celebration for fallen officers of the game warden profession, and I'm sure one of its kind," Hevenor said.

Like the memorial ceremony, the North American Game Warden Museum is indeed the only one of its kind, but to keep it maintained and updated, it depends on fund-raising and grants. An effective way the museum has raised money is with paving stones, which now stretch along a walkway on the building's north and west sides. "It's a fund-raiser, somewhat, for the museum and it's been very successful so far," Hevenor said.

The paving stones can be purchased from the museum and there are three different packages. A plain, unmarked stone, an engraved stone and an engraved stone with logo. A stone can be purchased by anyone and it doesn't have to be game warden related.

"The walkway is important and it's a nice additional feature,"

Timian said. "It's a way to recognize other peoples' and groups' connection and contribution to our natural world. You don't have to have died in the line of duty, or have been a game warden to have a paving stone. And it does help fund the museum because the paving stones have to be purchased. It works both ways, it gives the

person or group permanent recognition in a beautiful location and the museum gets money to keep going."

Right now the museum keeps the same season as the Peace Garden, from May 15 to September 12. Visitors sometimes come specifically to see the museum, like game wardens and the families of game wardens, Hevenor said, and others are just passing through the Peace Garden and stop in to look around.

The feedback from visitors has been very positive so far and people who visit the museum are impressed by the taxidermy animals. "They come to the Kodiak bear right away, of course, because he is so magnificent



The museum's Kodiak bear is literally the center of attention when you walk through the door.

and then when we explain that this isn't the typical wildlife museum, that increases the excitement," Hevenor said.

The museum's exhibits and Fallen Officer Memorial provide a platform for people to learn more about the importance of conservation, and illustrates the difficult job that game wardens take on. It seems to be working. "The museum is a beautiful place and the location is spectacular." Timian said. "I think

people who go there and tour the museum come away with something that gives them an appreciation of our natural resources and the game wardens who protect them."

ALLISON HESFORD, Bismarck, is a senior at Minnesota State University-Moorhead, and is interning with the Game and Fish Department this summer.



The paving stone walkway and Fallen Officer Memorial sit outside the museum surrounded by the Peace Garden. Inset: View of the North American Game Warden Museum from the Peace Tower.