



DISCOVERY

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE YELLOWSTONE ASSOCIATION



The Yellowstone Association provided significant funding for the educational exhibits at the new Canyon Visitor Center. Photo: NPS

By April Christofferson
Yellowstone Association

This year marks an important milestone—the Yellowstone Association’s 75th anniversary! Its growth, contributions to the park, and mission have expanded dramatically since its modest beginning 75 years ago. Today Yellowstone Association boasts 26,000 members; runs educational bookstores in the park’s visitor centers; publishes trail guides, books, pamphlets, and other products about Yellowstone; and contributes to the park and to visitor experiences in too many ways to count. But it started small.

What we know today as the Yellowstone Association began when a small group of people came together in 1933 to establish a park research library. The Yellowstone Library and Museum

Foundation realized proceeds of \$2,158 that first year from the sale of educational materials to park visitors. These funds were used to establish a research library through the purchase of books and subscriptions to periodicals—and one of this nation’s first cooperating associations was born.

Cooperating associations are now a longstanding tradition in the National

Park Service. Starting at Yosemite in 1923, these not-for-profit organizations provide program and financial assistance for interpretation, education, and research in national parks through the production and sale of educational materials to park visitors. They are considered a vital extension of the National Park Service’s interpretive and educational operations, not only for their financial aid—associations gave more than \$61 million to National Park Service partners last year—but also because they provide staffing and visitor services.

Of the 65 cooperating associations nationwide, Yellowstone Association is consistently a leader in the amount of aid it provides to the National Park Service, and it is one of the few cooperating associations that make a firm commitment to give at least

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15 percent of *gross* revenues from the sale of educational products and memberships to the park annually. This year, \$702,515 has been dedicated for park projects. Says executive director of Yellowstone Association, Pat Cole, “We’ve set the bar very high.”

Proceeds from the sale of educational materials have skyrocketed over the years. Educational sales for 2008 are expected to exceed \$2.7 million. Membership has also blossomed. Yellowstone Association established a dues-paying, non-voting membership program in 1980. The first year’s tally of 24 members has now reached more than 26,000 members in 50+ countries.

Through the years there were other changes for Yellowstone’s cooperating association, including its name. The Yellowstone Library and Museum Foundation became the Yellowstone Association for Natural Science, History and Education, Inc., in 1985; and, in 2002, the Yellowstone Association.

In short, what began in 1933 as a group



The Yellowstone Association works to ensure that uplifting, magical experiences continue to be available for many generations to come. Photo: Jenny Golding

of Yellowstone-loving people banding together to establish a research library has grown into an organization with a broader mission and range of activities.

Along the way it provided more than

\$17.9 million to benefit Yellowstone National Park and its visitors through cash and in-kind donations. It has accomplished an outstanding array of projects that reach far beyond that original purpose of a research library. Some of these projects are highly visible to park visitors. Others are pursued quietly and without fanfare—yet have no less impact on Yellowstone, and on the Yellowstone Association’s mission to “inspire, educate, preserve.”

Executive Director Pat Cole has been here to see two decades of this growth and change. She began with Yellowstone Association as business manager/bookkeeper/manager of retail bookstores in 1987, and in 1989, she became executive director, a position she holds to this day. When asked what the most important function of the Yellowstone Association is, Cole is quick to answer: “Helping people connect to Yellowstone in a deeper way.” She goes on to explain, “Personally, I believe that it’s going to be that connection to the park that in the long run will ensure that it’s preserved.”

Cole also believes that education is the key to helping people connect to Yellowstone.

To Educate

Yellowstone Association not only educates park visitors through its bookstores and the materials, exhibits, and programs it produces; but it also sponsors the Yellowstone Association Institute. Founded in 1976, the Institute

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THE MISSION OF THE YELLOWSTONE ASSOCIATION

The Yellowstone Association, in partnership with the National Park Service, fosters the public’s understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Yellowstone National Park and its surrounding ecosystem by funding and providing educational products and services.

P.O. Box 117 • Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190
www.YellowstoneAssociation.org • ya@yellowstoneassociation.org
 Office: 307-344-2293 • Institute: 307-344-2294
 Membership: 307-344-2289 • Sales: 877-967-0090
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