



CONTACT: Dominick Miller
millerd44@michigan.gov
Mackinac State Historic Parks
Phone: (906) 847-3328
www.mackinacparks.com

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Phil Porter to Retire from Mackinac State Historic Parks

MACKINAC ISLAND, MICH. — After serving 49 years with Mackinac State Historic Parks, including 17 as its director, Phil Porter will be retiring from the organization in October.

Porter announced his decision at the July 24 meeting of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission.

“I just want to express my sincere and profound gratitude to the commission for the opportunity to work for this organization for the past 49 years,” Porter said. “It’s a rare opportunity that a person gets to do the work that they love, in the place that they love for their entire career and, again, I am deeply grateful for this wonderful opportunity. I particularly appreciate the commitment of our commission, the talent and dedication of my co-workers, and the support my family, especially my wife Valerie who has been at my side for 47 of the 49 years.”

“On behalf of the commission and everyone involved with the parks, we want to thank Phil for his service. It really is an amazing story,” said Dan Loepp, Chairman of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission. “Phil is a true pro. It has been my pleasure to get to know him and his professionalism will truly be missed.”

Porter's legacy with MSHP is beyond impressive. He started with the organization as a 19-year old tour guide at Fort Mackinac in 1972 and was promoted to lead interpreter the following year. He continued working as a seasonal staff member while pursuing his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Kenyon College and master's degree in history museum studies from the State University of New York, Cooperstown Graduate Program.

He joined the permanent staff of MSHP in 1976 as Curator of Collections and was subsequently promoted to Curator of Interpretation and Chief Curator. He was appointed director of the parks in 2003.

During his tenure as director, the commission successfully completed several major projects including the re-opening of Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, rebranding of Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park, creation of The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum and Mackinac Island Artist-in-Residence program, reconstruction of Fort Holmes, creation of the Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum at Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, and installation of the Mackinac Island Native American Museum at the Biddle House.

"It will be very hard to imagine Mackinac Island and the park without him," said Richard Manoogian, Mackinac Island State Park Commission Vice Chairman, and longest tenured commission member. He mentioned the work Porter has put into his position, and the team he has surrounded himself with. "The parks have a great future because of what has happened in the past."

"Great leaders like Phil Porter are hard to come by in today's world of constant change," said Peter Pellerito, Mackinac Associates Board President. "Mackinac Associates knows and respects him because over his distinguished career he has continually set out to make a positive difference for the parks that he knows and loves, and for the people of the state of Michigan."

Porter has served on numerous boards and committees throughout the region and state, and has won several awards, including, most recently, the "Citizen Award" from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network in 2017.

"Phil's work prior to becoming director alone was impressive including programming, exhibits and numerous books," said Steve Brisson, Mackinac State Historic Parks Deputy Director. "His

seventeen years as director have continued to move the agency forward with an amazing list of accomplishments including the complete restoration and opening of Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, the development of the Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park, the creation of the Manoogian Art Museum and the reconstruction of Fort Holmes.”

Porter will still be a fixture on Mackinac Island in retirement and plans to spend additional time at his home in Cheboygan and travel with Valerie. He is also excited to have more time to visit with his five children and numerous grandchildren.

“He is truly a tribute to his family, past and present,” said Marlee Brown, member of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission and Mackinac Island resident. “He has been priceless for Mackinac Island, and I express my sincere gratitude to him.”

A downloadable version of this release can be found here. Please see the attached image.

Mackinac State Historic Parks, a family of living history museums and parks in northern Michigan’s Straits of Mackinac, is an agency within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Its sites—which are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums—include Fort Mackinac, the Biddle House, The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Historic Downtown Mackinac, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park and Michilimackinac State Park in Mackinaw City. Mackinac State Historic Parks is governed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, established in 1895 to protect, preserve and present the parks’ rich historic and natural resources for the education and recreation of future generations. Visitor information is available at (231) 436-4100 or on the web at www.mackinacparks.com.

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