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CHARLIE MAGUIRE WINS REGIONAL FREEMAN TILDEN AWARD

Park Watchdog Group Recognizes Winner for Outstanding Park Interpretation Program

Beaumont, Texas -- The National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) and the National Park Service (NPS) Sunday presented the Midwest Field Area Freeman Tilden Award to Charlie Maguire, Park Ranger for River Education at the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Maguire received the award for his "Songs of the Mississippi River" program. The award, named for the "father of interpretation" in the Park Service, honors park employees who find innovative ways of educating park visitors about their park.

"Charlie Maguire has found a creative way to create public excitement about resources, history, and culture that are often taken for granted," said NPCA Executive Officer Bill Watson. "He is a model of the fine interpretive work that makes our national parks and their rangers so memorable to so many visitors."

Maguire's program is a supplement to the regular park exhibits offered. Maguire composed and performs 16 songs with educational messages about the resources of the Mississippi River. Each song shows a different perspective of the river and is used to inspire and connect people to the river. Over the last year, Maguire has presented 57 programs, 12 directed exclusively to urban, minority audiences, reaching over 132,000 people.

"Maguire composed powerful new songs about the Mississippi River that inspired diverse groups of people to reconnect with the river and its history," says JoAnn Kyril, the superintendent at Mississippi River who nominated Maguire for the award. "The process of creating music has brought people, neighborhoods, communities, and organizations together to celebrate the river through concerts and programs."

"I am the first 'official' singing park ranger specifically hired to write and perform songs about the Mississippi River for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," says Maguire of his project. Maguire has worked at the Mississippi River site since 1995 after touring nationally and in Canada for 20 years prior to joining the Park Service. "The best part of this project is the research of getting it right and telling stories that have never been told before," he says. "I like where that leads me and I like to create a song where people leave the park singing."

The National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) is America's only private nonprofit citizen organization dedicated solely to preserving, protecting, and enhancing the US National Park System. An association of "Citizens Protecting America's Parks," NPCA was founded in 1919 and today has nearly 500,000 members.