

After 14 years of multitasking, Janice Nowik retires from her roles with the Friends

The happy coincidence that brought Janice Nowik into the welcoming embrace of the Friends of Gillette Castle State Park lives vividly in her memory.

It happened in 2007, as the Rocky Hill resident retired from 35 years of service with the Veterans Administration and Internal Revenue Service. Seeking part-time work to fill her spare time, she took an exam at a placement service in Middletown.

“They called a couple of days later and said, ‘We have the perfect job for you’” — working at the Friends’ gift shop at Gillette Castle.

“The funny thing was that I had just bought a house in Moodus,” she said. “This was kind of meant to be, so I was very happy about it.”

Janice already had visited the state park with her children and was familiar with the Castle. Former Friends President Judy Glover schooled her in the shop’s operations and, as time went on, Janice became increasingly familiar with the Friends’ diverse efforts.

Ultimately, Janice became an essential force well beyond serving as gift shop manager, for she also worked as a Castle guide and volunteered as Friends president from 2014 to 2018.



Janice at the gift shop in 2020



Janice occasionally served as Mrs. Claus for the holidays.

“From attending the meetings and working on projects, I was involved with everything they were doing,” she said.

Now, Janice is fully retiring and stepping away from her multiple roles with the Friends. In doing so, she takes satisfaction in “a lot of little things” — culminating in a great deal of effort — to enhance the Castle, boost attendance, and educate people about the history of William Gillette and his unique home.

During an online meeting of Friends members on March 9, Vice President Paul Schiller displayed a certificate of appreciation that is to be presented to Janice. The certificate, signed by Paul and President Wendy Vincent, expresses the organization's appreciation to Janice for her many substantive efforts over nearly one and a half decades.

While the nonprofit gift shop was under Janice's management, visitors were drawn in increasingly to check out the newly installed racks, cases and shelving that displayed an inventory that had burgeoned by approximately 50 percent under Janice's care.

Janice also promoted sales by having authors sign books sold in the shop. The results of her efforts paid off in remarkable ways, chiefly by helping to finance projects big and small.

The biggest came when the shop's income helped provide approximately \$6,000 to restore Gillette's train engine, now on display in the Visitor's Center.

"That was quite an undertaking and that came out beautifully," she said.

The shop's operations also supported the purchase and installation of approximately \$3,000 in audiovisual equipment in the center's auditorium. Subsequently, Janice oversaw the Castle's own premiere in 2015 of Gillette's rediscovered and restored 1916 film "Sherlock Holmes." She also arranged for volunteers and refreshments for the scores of visitors who attended multiple showings.

"That was quite a challenge," she said. "I was most proud of putting on that film and helping to buy the equipment for that room."



Janice, along with other famous faces of the Friends (Harold "Tyke" Niver and Theodora "Teddie" Niver, a.k.a. "The Gillettes") at the 2015 screening of "Sherlock Holmes."

Janice and her husband of 36 years, Jim, are the parents of a son, Jamie, and a daughter, Amberly. The couple plan to spend their time traveling and visiting family members.

“I really did enjoy everything that I did at the Castle, although it’s time for me to really retire, and I am looking forward to it,” she said with a laugh. “But you’ll see me around. If there’s some project the Friends are working on, I might volunteer.”

This article was written by Friends member John C. Sherwood of MysteryVisits Communications.

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William Gillette wonders “Will I see Janice around the Castle someday?” Like Mona Lisa, Janice just smiles.