

# Woman's efforts led to Grant visitor center

BY LEE COLEMAN  
Gazette Reporter

When the Ulysses S. Grant Cottage opens in May and visitors admire the new visitor center at the state historic site, they can be grateful for the efforts of Beth Pfaffenbach.

## Cottage

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Pfaffenbach announced proudly early this year that the loan had finally been paid off through a series of fundraising events and contributions from community people and organizations.

Grant Cottage on Mount McGregor in Wilson and Moreau is where Civil War General and later President Ulysses S. Grant spent his final days, finishing his memoirs there, and dying in the cottage on July 23, 1885.

In an unusual proceeding, the Saratoga-Capital District Commission for the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation passed a special resolution this month honoring the memory of Pfaffenbach.

"She was a volunteer at the cottage for nine years," Heather Mabee said. She was also president of the Friends of Grant Cottage during these years as well.

Robert Kuhn, acting regional director, said Pfaffenbach was one of the "driving forces" in the visitor center initiative.

The visitor center has display and meeting space, a gift shop, educational exhibits, as well as

"Beth really took the bull by the horns," said Tim Mabee of Saratoga Springs about the visitor center project that started in 2003 and was completed in 2006.

During these years, Agnes Elizabeth "Beth" Pfaffenbach of Wilton was president of the Friends of Grant Cottage. Mabee was a

member of the group during that time.

This volunteer organization and operates Grant Cottage for the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

"This woman was phenomenal," said Heather Mabee, chairwoman of the Saratoga-Capital District

State Park Commission. Pfaffenbach, 66, died on Feb. 24. She was a retired elementary school teacher in the Shenandoah Central School District and also active in the Schenectady Historical Society.

Heather Mabee said Pfaffenbach was instrumental in having the

Friends of Grant Cottage take out a \$35,000 loan from a local bank to help with the \$125,000 transformation of a large 1913 arts and crafts style stone garage near the cottage into a modern visitors' center.

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public restrooms and a small kitchen.

"She was instrumental in changing the operation up there," Kuhn said about Pfaffenbach and Grant Cottage.

Tim Mabee, who is Heather Mabee's husband, said Pfaffenbach worked closely with the state Department of Correctional Services, which operates Mount McGregor State Prison only a few hundred yards from Grant Cottage.

Tim Mabee said that Pfaffenbach was able to get help from prison inmates in doing site work for the visitor center as well as painting and other money-saving tasks.

In 2002, the Friends of Grant Cottage was awarded a \$60,615 state grant for the visitor center project from the Environmental Protection Fund of the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act. The matching grant required the Friends to raise the other \$60,000 for the project.

State legislators who represent Saratoga County were able to obtain some other state funding to help the Friends, but the group finally decided that they needed to take out the \$35,000 loan from Adirondack Trust Co. in Saratoga Springs in order to get the job done.

"She was a hard worker," Tim Mabee said about Pfaffenbach. The new visitors' center now stands as a memorial to this hard-working volunteer.

Grant Cottage will open on Memorial Day weekend and remain open with regular hours through Labor Day. The cottage also maintains some fall hours.

The cottage can be reached by taking Northway Exit 16 in Wilton, heading west on Ballard Road, and then following the Grant Cottage signs up Mount McGregor to the state historic site.

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