

A. Robert Nellen

Written by Administrator
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Bob Nellen started employment with Long Island State Parks in 1951 as a Lifeguard, then Boatswain and finally a Lieutenant before becoming a Coordinator. He was then appointed the Region's first Director of Lifeguards and Water Safety and, in 1990, the Park Manager of Wildwood State Park. Bob was working in his 60th year when he passed on May 16, 2010. He was a man of the highest integrity who had a great love for his family, friends and parks.

As a 17-year-old high school student, Bob Nellen took a vocational aptitude test that indicated he should become a park ranger. He eventually pursued a parks career - one that lasted 60 years. Nellen, 77, backed into his vocation, starting out as a seasonal lifeguard at Jones Beach. He ended it managing Wildwood State Park before he died at his home in the park May 16 from esophageal cancer. [Click here for News article](#)

"He's one of the greatest people I've ever known," said Ronald Foley, regional director for the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Nellen, who went on medical leave last fall as his health worsened, was born in Little Neck, Queens. He graduated from Power Memorial High School in Manhattan and received a bachelor's degree in theology from Fordham University. His first parks job was in 1951 when he became a seasonal lifeguard while working the rest of the year as a photo engraver in Manhattan. He returned to the beach every summer, moving up the chain of command, except for when he served in the Army from 1954 to 1956 in Europe as a French-German linguist. In 1981, he went to work full time for the parks department, starting out as the region's first water safety director. A strong swimmer, he won many competitions.

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Nine years later, he was named manager at Wildwood, then rundown and contending with rowdy behavior in the campground. Despite limited resources, Nellen resolved both problems, park officials said. Eventually he also supervised Brookhaven State Park and the yet-to-open Jamesport State Park.

"He knew so many things, but nature really seemed to resonate with him," said his daughter, Valerie Nellen of San Juan Capistrano, Calif. "He knew the whole life story of every plant and animal in the park. It just came to him so naturally." Nellen's family and co-workers fondly recall the deadpan expression he used to mask his witty, dry sense of humor. His daughter cited an example when he led nighttime owl walks in the winter. "I remember one night when it was so cold and there just weren't any owls and my dad was freezing and got sick of waiting so he ducked behind a copse of trees and did a pitch-perfect shriek-owl imitation. The nature enthusiasts were thrilled." And Nellen got to go back to his warm house.

Nellen's wife of 31 years, Maxine, died in 1998. In addition to his daughter, Nellen is survived by a son, Christopher of Sea Cliff, and a grandson. Nellen's remains were cremated. A memorial service will be held at Wildwood on June 19 at 10 a.m.