

FOCUS ON LEISURE: Dennis Reidenbach '76 has a new adventure every day as the superintendent to one of the country's premier national historical parks.

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Park Place

Dennis Reidenbach '76 has a new adventure every day as the superintendent at one of the country's premier national historical parks

By Amy Clingensmith '96

Dennis Reidenbach '76 has the unique privilege of working in a national treasure. He is a stone's throw away from the place where the Declaration of Independence was signed. Perhaps the greatest symbol of freedom in the world – the Liberty Bell – is literally at arm's length.

But as superintendent of Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Reidenbach also has the opportunity to soak in national treasures of a different type – the people who tell the story of freedom every day.

During a walk around the park, which is nestled in the historic downtown area, Reidenbach in his olive green uniform and ranger-like hat says hello to every employee by name as he passes them. Some are planting flowers, others cleaning the sidewalks, still more leading tour groups.

Then there are those he doesn't know personally, but still the same, they are part of the park. Groups of children in brightly colored jackets forming a long chain by their linked hands weave over the cobblestones. International visitors

speaking another language gaze up at Independence Hall, appreciating what the treasures at the park have meant, not only for Americans, but for the world.

Reidenbach sees their wonder and smiles.

This never gets old.



Dennis Reidenbach grew up about an hour from Grove City, in the Sewickley area of Fair Oaks. His pastor was a Grove City grad so Dennis made a visit to the College for two reasons: he respected his pastor's advice and the reasonable cost was a draw as well. Once on campus, he fell in love with its friendliness.

Since then, he has kept up his Grove City friendships, many of them from the '70s Outing Club era and some of whom attended the Philadelphia-area alumni event at Independence Hall and City Tavern on March 16. More than 100 alumni and friends ended their private tour at the Liberty Bell (see page 27).

Several aspects of Grove City found their way into Reidenbach's life. For one, he points to his grad year – '76 – celebrated as the College's 100th class and a year that has obvious significance in his job.

Reidenbach was named to the top position at the park in November 2005, after a varied career with the government and the National Park Service, which is a part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Even several months after his appointment, he shuffled between two offices. He didn't find time to make the move from his old office into the new until just this spring.

It's been a busy year.

One office held "Grove City stuff" – his diploma, pictures from Outing Club trips, memorabilia from the Grove, family photographs taken on campus.

In a way, Reidenbach's time at Grove City led him to his current station in life. He reflects on history and political science courses taught by the late Dr. David McKillop.

"He created in me an appreciation of the history of this country, as well as world history," Reidenbach says.

Additionally, some of the same principles the College was founded upon figure into the way the park is run. For example, the park's \$300 million, 10-year

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DENNIS REIDENBACH '76, FAR LEFT CORNER, SHOWS CHILDREN VISITING THE INDEPENDENCE PARK INSTITUTE SOME INTRICACIES OF AMERICAN HISTORY. / Contributed photo

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redevelopment project will be completed without federal funding. And while Reidenbach did not create this “policy” at the park, he certainly can appreciate its merits.

Even Reidenbach’s choice of leisure activities at Grove City figured their way into his present. He was active in the Outing Club and formed great friendships through the popular organization. It was through the club that Reidenbach discovered a love for nature and the outdoors and realized each individual’s responsibility to preserve resources at all levels.

But perhaps most importantly, Reidenbach met his partner in life at Grove City – Kristine (Knudsen ’77). And while they did date at Grove City, they did not become serious before Dennis left in ’76. But at an Outing Club trip in 1978, they rekindled their relationship, married and moved to Glendale, near Philadelphia, where they have lived since 1980.

Although the job of superintendent keeps him extremely busy, Reidenbach finds time for another role close to his heart – coach for the Montgomery County Special Olympics, an organization in which his 24-year-old son Erik, a high-functioning autistic, is active. Erik’s younger brother, Matthew, 22, graduated from Grove City College this spring with an accounting degree and will start a job with Deloitte in Philadelphia in September after taking the CPA exam this summer. He is engaged to Rachel Scardigno ’07.

Matthew’s dad remembers his first job after graduation well. A business/political science double major at Grove City, Reidenbach arrived in Philadelphia soon after Commencement to start his stint in the “real world.” He worked for the U.S. Department of Defense in the Meat for the Military Program. That’s right. His job was to purchase meat for the military, which may sound like an oddity but the 22-year-old Reidenbach was handling multi-million dollar accounts as he kept

soldiers fed with steak, hamburger and other meats purchased from vendors around the country. In his first week, he was ordering 34,000 pounds of meat a day.

He performed that job for two years, and then moved to Williamsburg, Va., to do the same work. He then took a job as a federal buyer and a contract negotiator for photographic equipment for the government through the General Services Administration. In this position, Reidenbach says, he learned more about the business side, not necessarily the photography side.

This knowledge suited him well, as the National Park Service isn’t all about camping, nature and history. It’s about business, too.

In 1983, Reidenbach was named the chief of contracting for the National Park Service, overseeing Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia and Delaware. Two of his first projects were

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Park Place

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reroofing the famous landmark Independence Hall and rehabilitating the historic Roebling Bridge, running between the Pennsylvania-New York border. When complete, the latter earned the Presidential Design Award.

These two projects left a mark on the nation's landscape and they left an impression on Reidenbach as well. He realized he'd found his niche and wanted to stay with the National Park Service, mainly because he believed wholeheartedly in its mission: to preserve and protect the country's cultural and natural resources.

After a five-year stint in contracting with the National Park Service, he moved to the position of administrative officer/business manager for Independence National Historical Park. Then in '93, he was promoted to deputy superintendent and took his most recent step up the parks ladder when he was named superintendent.

Reidenbach's path to his current position was a bit of a detour from the track most superintendents take. Many, he says, start as park rangers and move their way through the system. Reidenbach went the business route, which, he says, gives him a unique perspective into the parks industry.

In his former role, his duties were more internal. Now he is out in the community and more involved with the public through social engagements and park exhibits. A routine day may consist of planning press conferences, working indirectly on landscaping, coordinating dignitary visits, securing funding for projects, teaching history lessons to kids, hammering out the budget and supervising the park's 300 employees.

In terms of operating size, Independence National Historical Park is the third largest in the nation, behind only Yellowstone and Yosemite, and bigger than Grand Canyon and Everglades national parks. It is one of the most visited in the country. In fact, two million people visited the new home of the Liberty Bell in 2005 – the most since the Bicentennial.

Independence Hall and the Bell, Reidenbach says, are the two most recognizable fixtures of the park, but many other "icons of freedom" – such as Congress Hall, Franklin Court, the famous Portrait Gallery in the Second Bank of the United States, Carpenters' Hall, Declaration House and City Tavern – draw hundreds of thousands of international visitors every year.

Reidenbach is now in the throes of one of the most important projects in Independence Park's history – a \$300 million redevelopment project set to be complete July 4, 2007. The project includes a \$10 million visitor's center and the National Constitution Center, a 130,000-square-foot building highlighting one of the most important documents in U.S. history and currently celebrating the 300th birthday of Benjamin Franklin.

Additionally, the \$10 million Liberty Bell Center gives visitors a walk through the life of the Bell, its history, journey to Philadelphia, details on the crack within the Bell, and the ultimate lesson that the crack reminds visitors that liberty is not perfect but constantly evolving.

"History was made here," he says, "and history continues to be made here."

(Amy Clingensmith '96 is the Grove City College director of communications and GeDUNK managing editor.)

Facts and figures on Independence National Historical Park

Established by Congress in 1948, Independence National Historical Park tells the story of the nation's great beginnings; its leaders such as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson; the issues that have shaped Americans' beliefs from racial equality and social justice; and the events continue to come to life year after year in textbooks – the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the drafting of the Constitution.

- Independence National Historical Park sees 5 million visitors per year.
- The park is a year-round attraction. Spring brings schoolchildren and teachers on class trips; summer sees families on vacations; fall is a great season for senior citizens to enjoy the beauty of the park; and winter is a time when visitors can read every word of the historic and interactive displays, as the pace slows.
- The Independence Park Institute focuses on all the educational aspects of the park and the innumerable lessons available to learners of all ages.
- During the tenure of Superintendent Dennis Reidenbach '76, the park has seen such dignitaries as former U.S. President Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela, South African President F.W. DeClerk, Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, some who have received the Liberty Medal. "These people," Reidenbach says, "can come to the park and talk about how American freedom can impact the world."
- For those visiting, there are multitudes of activities that could fill several days. For one, there's a walking tour through the city that traces the Underground Railroad; the original homes of Dolley Todd, Bishop William White, Thaddeus Kosciuszko and Edgar Allan Poe; Liberty Bell Center; Independence Hall; Congress Hall; Old City Hall; Second Bank of the United States; Carpenters' Hall; Franklin Court; Christ Church; Declaration House; City Tavern; Mikveh Israel Cemetery; Philosophical Hall; National Constitution Center; Independence Visitor Center; Free Quaker Meeting House and the Merchants' Exchange Building
- Visit www.nps.gov/inde for more information.