

Obituaries

Kenneth E. Avery dies; he was curator of oldest U.S. public wildflower garden

By Allie Shah
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Kenneth E. Avery, whose delicate manner and keen observational skills charmed visitors to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary in Minneapolis's Wirth Park for nearly 30 years, died Wednesday in his Minneapolis home. He was 72.

As curator for the oldest public wildflower garden in the country, he led tours for school groups, gave slide presentations and did maintenance work until his retirement in 1986.

"He kind of wore many hats," said his replacement, Cary George, who has known him for 24 years and trained under him.

George said Avery was the kind of person whom you could just look at and know he was in the right job.

"He was excited every spring of his life," George said. "It was such a perfect fit for him, and he loved it. I don't think there was that transition from work to home. He was a perfect man for the job and for the times."

During the 1950s and 1960s, when Avery started out at Theodore Wirth, people had more leisure time, George said. "They would slot out a lot of time, a day of their life, to come to the wildflower garden and to have a

picnic in Wirth Park."

Avery often noticed details that others missed.

"He would say, 'Did you notice the lady-slipper was blooming?' and I would think, 'Why didn't I see that?'" George said.

"He had that childlike wonder about the place and about wildflowers. He brought it out so that everybody came away with that impression."

Avery, a 1952 University of Minnesota graduate, studied horticulture.

He also served in the Navy in the Pacific during World War II.

At the Wildflower Garden he was especially adept with visiting children.

"What he was good at . . . was getting them to slow down and to see things," George said.

"What he loved to do was compare them to elephants. He would tell them, 'To the chipmunks and the squirrels and the birds, you seem like giant elephants.'"

His interest in nature did not wane after retirement. He volunteered at the Minnesota Zoo and would frequently stroll through Wirth Park and visit the garden.

He is survived by his wife of 46 years, Muriel; a daughter, Geri McCann of Minneapolis; a brother, William of Brainerd, Minn.; four grandchildren, and

one great-granddaughter.

Services will be held at 1 p.m. today at the Werness Brothers Funeral Chapel, 3500 W. 50th St., Minneapolis. Visitation will begin there at noon. Memorials are suggested to Friends of the Wildflower Garden or the Minnesota Zoo.

Also noted

Henry Vestine, 52, guitarist of the rock band Canned Heat, best known for its hit "Going Up the Country" and its 1969 performance at Woodstock, died of heart and respiratory failure Oct. 20 near Paris. Before he died, he asked that his ashes, now buried in Oregon, eventually be transported to a crater on the moon named after his father, a noted astrophysicist.

Dame Jean Conan Doyle, 84, the last surviving child of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, died Tuesday in London. In later years she kept a critical eye on adaptations of her father's work, especially the Sherlock Holmes stories.