

In Memory

In Memoriam — ALAN F. KEECH

by Laura McCarthy

On October 27, 2009, the Division of Wildlife Conservation lost a member of its family with the passing of Alan F. Keech. Al loved Alaska, especially the community of Tok. He joined the Tok Fish and Game staff as a Wildlife Technician in late 1999, and stayed until his retirement August 1, 2009. When Al passed from this world he had his loved ones by his side, his wife of 42 years, Betsy, and their three sons Paul, Mark, John, and daughter Elizabeth.

Al was born in Oswego, New York on July 6, 1940. He learned about hard work at an early age while growing up on a fruit and dairy farm with his brother Jim in New Haven, New York. His father, Albert, inspired ingenuity and a work ethic that would serve Al well during his life. After graduating high school, Al enlisted in the U.S. Army/82nd Airborne Division. In 1965, he received a Bachelor of Science in industrial arts education from State University College at Oswego, New York, and in 1973 a Master's Degree in vocational education from Cal State Long Beach.

In 1967, Al and Betsy were married in Hyde Park, New York. In summer 1968, they took a 6-week camping trip to Alaska. Eleven years later, that camping trip inspired them to move the family from San Gabriel, California to Tok, Alaska. Al was employed by the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Alaska Gateway School District as an industrial arts/vocational education teacher, career adviser, and wrestling coach until his retirement in 1997. Al was a natural-born teacher and mentor to everyone he met. Many of Al's former students are successful members of society today because of his positive influence during their younger years.

When faced with a challenge, it was Al's nature to do his best and follow through on commitments. During his teaching days he organized a field trip from Tok to Fairbanks with a bus load of junior and high school vocational students. Al wanted the kids to view some facilities in Fairbanks for future job prospects. They overnighted at a school gymnasium where the chaperons were responsible for ensuring the kids didn't leave the building during the night. One by one the chaperons fell asleep during the early morning hours – but not Al – he could be seen standing guard at the light of dawn.

Al was a man of faith and a communicant of Holy Rosary Church. He was drawn to the beauty, serenity, and challenges of Alaska. He loved the outdoors and enjoyed family activities, hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, camping, and flying. He was a former member of the Civil Air Patrol in El Monte, California and in Tok and a member of the Tok Shooter's Association. It was noticed by family and friends early on that Al had a natural ability with firearms.

Al not only gave his all to his family, he carried that same spirit to his work as a teacher and as a technician with Fish and Game. A coworker noted that a clock in the office wasn't necessary because when Al walked through the door it meant that it was 8:00, 12:00, 1:00, or 4:30. Al was always reliable, but more importantly he was an honest, hardworking, and honorable person. A Wildlife Technician's duties are widely diverse. Whether it was flying surveys, conducting fieldwork, assisting with necropsies in the lab, creating maps, or organizing reports for the Tok ADF&G library, Al performed his duties with pride and passion.

His coworkers and friends have a great respect for the advice and guidance he shared with them throughout the years. In addition to Al's hard-working, honest, and loyal character, he was a true gentleman. As his brother Jim reflected, Al was the epitome of manliness – a man's man through and through.

The take-away message from Al's memorial service was to remember to give thanks to those around us today – they may not be here tomorrow.

A life well lived — rest in peace Al Keech

