



Are You a VIP?

By Gaylon Gwin, Staff Writer

Parks Volunteer Mission Statement

To volunteer my time and energy to an Alabama State Park in the area in which my assistance can be best utilized

To work with and assist park staff in providing knowledge, information and assistance to volunteers. And to dedicate this volunteer service toward providing and insuring a pleasant and enjoyable experience for each and every visitor of an Alabama State Park.

The Alabama State Parks volunteer program has stepped up to a new level bringing it into association with the national *Take Pride in America* program. The national partnership was announced by Governor Bob Riley on February 9, 2004, at a press conference in Oak Mountain State Park near Birmingham. Also participating in the announcement were First Lady Patsy Riley; Marti Allbright, executive director of Take Pride in America; M. Barnett Lawley, Commissioner of Conservation and Natural Resources; and Mark Easterwood, Director of the Alabama State Parks Division. Alabama's program is called Volunteers in Parks, or V.I.P.

"The parks belong to us, and it is our duty and responsibility to take care of public lands," said Marti Allbright, Executive Director of Take Pride in America. "Alabama's V.I.P. program offers an opportunity for citizens to demonstrate good stewardship."

Mark Easterwood, Director of the Alabama State Parks Division, praised the work of volunteers. He presented a certificate of appreciation to Les Miller, calling him an

outstanding friend of Oak Mountain State Park for his 23 years of volunteer service. Miller, who still takes an active part in leading outdoor walks, challenged the audience to get involved. He especially targeted the 19-35 age group. "These are the people who will save our parks so they will be here for our children and grandchildren."

Conservation Commissioner M. Barnett Lawley stated, "Governor Riley has emphasized that we should always do the right thing, and participation in the Take Pride in America program is the right thing."

"It's easy to get involved," said Governor Riley. "There are so many things that we can do to take care of our lands. Anyone who visits a state park one or two times a year should volunteer."

Easterwood concluded the press briefing, "By becoming a V.I.P., you're taking pride in Alabama, and taking pride in America."

Following the announcement, Governor and Mrs. Riley, Allbright, Easterwood, and others prepared and planted a wildflower bed near the entrance of the park.

Alabama's V.I.P. Program

The Alabama State Parks system has welcomed volunteers in the past, but this is the first time the State Parks Division has launched a uniform statewide volunteer program. Each Alabama State Park has a staff person designated as the volunteer coordinator to provide general information regarding the status and responsibilities of volunteer positions. The new Volunteers in Parks (V.I.P.) program offers different levels of volunteer opportunities within the state parks system, with similar duties and work at each of the parks. A V.I.P. handbook details the mission and types of work conducted by volunteers, as well as the application process and agreement.

Among the volunteer opportunities are campground hosts and campground activity directors. Hosts usually serve for one month at a time and are provided a complimentary campsite during the period they serve. Their duties may include guest assistance, maintenance, security, and help-

ing park staff with other tasks. The Campground Activity Director schedules and conducts entertainment and activities in the campground for the campers. Activities usually take place on Friday and Saturday nights during the summer months.

V.I.P. Support Groups organize and work in the park of their choice, providing needed support in landscaping, trail development and maintenance, and other special projects. Support Groups help monitor the condition of the parks and provide information regarding needed improvements and repairs.

The Take Pride in America program aims to seek, support, and recognize volunteers who work to improve our national parks, forests, grasslands and wildlife refuges, public lands, cultural and historic sites, playgrounds and other recreational areas. The TPIA program, established by the U.S. Department of the Interior, calls on citizens and communities to demonstrate local pride, initiative, and stewardship.

For more information about the V.I.P. program, contact one of Alabama's State Parks.



Governor Bob Riley installs a sign documenting a wildflower planting at Oak Mountain State Park. Assisting him are Randy Jinks, who is holding the sign while Marti Allbright, executive director of Take Pride in America, and First Lady Patsy Riley look on. The wildflower planting kicked off the new Volunteers in Parks program in Alabama.



VIP

**contact the park
in which you would
like to volunteer**

Bladon Springs	251-754-9207
Blue Springs	334-397-4875
Buck's Pocket.....	256-659-2000
Cathedral Caverns.....	256-728-8193
Chattahoochee	334-522-3607
Cheaha	256-488-5111
Chewacla.....	334-887-5621
Chickasaw	334-295-8230
Claude D. Kelley.....	251-862-2511
DeSoto.....	256-845-0051
Florala	334-858-6425
Frank Jackson	334-493-6988
Gulf.....	251-948-7275
Lake Guntersville.....	256-571-5444
Lake Lurleen	205-339-1558
Lakepoint.....	334-687-6676
Meaher	251-626-5529
Monte Sano.....	256-534-3757
Oak Mountain	205-620-2524
Paul M. Grist.....	334-872-5846
Rickwood Caverns.....	205-647-9692
Roland Cooper	334-682-4838
Joe Wheeler	256-247-5466
Wind Creek.....	256-329-0845

Call Today!