

MOUNT
RUSHMORE
SOCIETY



2023 Highlights

People Behind the Purpose

Spotlight on Leadership: Diana Nielsen, CEO

For more than 30 years, Diana Nielsen has been an advocate, ambassador, and unwavering champion for the Black Hills. Since 1999, she has led the Mount Rushmore Society as CEO, helping shape its evolution as a dynamic nonprofit partner to one of America's most iconic landmarks.

Diana likes to call herself the “Accidental CEO.” A South Dakota native and graduate of the University

of South Dakota, she began her career in hospitality and tourism with the Spearfish Chamber and Visitors Bureau. It was there that she discovered the power of nonprofit work—and a love for creating meaningful visitor experiences. That passion brought her to the Mount Rushmore Society, where she's been leading with vision (and humor) ever since.

In 2023, Diana remained at the helm as the Society celebrated new milestones in donor recognition, film production, and youth engagement. She continues to be deeply inspired by the Memorial and all it represents—freedom, democracy, and the promise of future generations.

“I'm so proud of the work we do on behalf of the National Park Service,” Diana says. “People assume our parks have all the resources they need, but they don't. Our donors make the difference—whether it's helping us recreate the evening lighting ceremony or keeping the Junior Ranger program free for more than 25,000 kids each year.”

Her proudest accomplishments? Building a strong team, fostering a dedicated board of directors, and saying “yes” more often than not.

“My superpower is asking, ‘How hard can it be?’ and then figuring it out,” she jokes. “That's how I ended up herding buffalo once... and now I help ‘herd’ guests at the Governor's Buffalo Roundup each year.”

Whether leading staff, wrangling donors, or contemplating her future book—The Lazy Woman's Guide to the Black Hills—Diana brings curiosity, creativity, and courage to everything she does. And we're lucky to have her guiding the way.



People Behind the Purpose

Meet Kenzie Caldwell: Director of Operations

In 2023, the Mount Rushmore Society was excited to welcome Kenzie Caldwell as our new Director of Operations. In this role, Kenzie supports many parts of the Society's day-to-day work—from retail and fundraising to volunteer coordination and behind-the-scenes logistics.

Kenzie brings a wide range of experience and a practical, hands-on approach to her work. She says she's most proud of the variety of skills she's developed throughout her career—skills she's already putting to good use here at the Society.

She's especially looking forward to regular visits to the Memorial (a definite job perk), getting to know the team, and building connections with rangers, board members, and vendors. When she's off the clock, Kenzie enjoys time outdoors with her fiancé and their two dogs—camping, fishing, or helping out on the family ranch.

We're so glad to have Kenzie on the team!



“What stood out to me from day one is how passionate everyone is about the mission,” Kenzie shared. “From the sales floor to the admin team to our CEO, it’s clear how much people care about Mount Rushmore and the work we do to support it.”

Stories from the Mountain



Focus on the Faces of Mount Rushmore: Alex Baker

When most people picture Mount Rushmore, the iconic granite faces come to mind—but behind the scenes, dedicated individuals are working every day to preserve the Memorial and welcome millions of visitors. Alex Baker, a Visitor Services Assistant, is one of those people.

Alex's National Park Service journey began right here at Mount Rushmore in 2015 as a Kay Jorgensen Scholarship Intern, a program funded by the Mount Rushmore Society. That internship opened the door to a career in public lands, and Alex went on to serve seasonally at several parks, including Pipe Spring National Monument and Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area. He later became a permanent employee at Independence National Historical Park before returning to Mount Rushmore in 2023.

In his current role, Alex works on the front lines—greeting visitors, answering questions, and helping guests connect more deeply with the history and meaning of the Memorial.

Thanks to your support, the Mount Rushmore Society helps launch park careers like Alex's. Donations and bookstore purchases fund internship opportunities, seasonal ranger positions, and vital interpretive programming that enriches every visit.



A little each month. A lasting impact.

Granite Givers are a dedicated community of monthly donors who help sustain the Mount Rushmore Society's mission all year long. Their ongoing support provides the steady foundation we need to preserve the Memorial and promote the ideals it represents—for today and for generations to come.

Any amount. Every month. Your gift matters.

By becoming a Granite Giver, you're partnering with us and the National Park Service to ensure Mount Rushmore continues to inspire, educate, and endure.

Join today and make your mark in granite.

Stories from the Mountain

Focus on the Faces of Mount Rushmore: Ranger Sarah

Behind the scenes at Mount Rushmore, there's a dedicated team of National Park Service staff working to ensure every visitor has a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Ranger Sarah is one of those exceptional individuals.

Sarah's journey with the National Park Service began in 2005 when she was a student at Minnesota State University Mankato. A chance classroom visit from Mount Rushmore's Chief Ranger—and a well-timed recommendation from her academic advisor—led to a summer job as a Visitor Use Assistant. Though she cried when she left Minnesota, she soon found herself crying again when the season ended—this time, because she didn't want to leave the Black Hills.

That early experience launched a remarkable career. In 2006, Sarah became a full-time Law Enforcement Ranger at Mount Rushmore, serving in that role for 15 years and helping ensure the safety and security of staff and millions of visitors. In 2021, Sarah took on a new challenge as the park's Concessions Management Specialist. In this role, she serves as the liaison to Xanterra Parks & Resorts, overseeing the largest concession contract in the NPS Midwest Region and ensuring that visitor services—from dining to retail—meet the high standards of the Memorial.

Sarah's story is a powerful reminder that careers in public service can start with a single raised hand, a timely connection, or a summer job that turns into a calling.

“I love that I get to work with people from all different backgrounds, but who share a common mission: to preserve and protect this special place,” she says. “In my current role, I get to support every division at the park and help shape the visitor experience in a really meaningful way.”



Today, park rangers like Sarah work behind the scenes and with the visiting public to make sure that every visitor at Mount Rushmore has a once in a lifetime experience.

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Stories from the Mountain

Sequoia Crosswhite: Storyteller, Musician, Educator

Sequoia Crosswhite is a gifted storyteller, musician, and cultural interpreter who brings the traditions of the Lakota people to life at Mount Rushmore National Memorial each summer. A member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and a direct descendant of Chief War Eagle and Chief Swift Cloud, Sequoia has spent the past 13 years sharing stories through speech, music, and dance at the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota Heritage Village.

His presence at the Memorial offers visitors a unique opportunity to hear firsthand perspectives on the land's history, Indigenous identity, and cultural continuity.

The Heritage Village, where Sequoia performs and teaches, is made possible through generous donor support to the Mount Rushmore Society. This programming helps ensure that the stories of the people who lived on and cared for this land long before the Memorial was carved are honored and heard.



“Culture has always been my passion,” Sequoia shared. “When I met Superintendent Gerard Baker years ago, I saw an opportunity to give voice to the First Nations from this area. I love meeting people from all over the world and seeing them come together under the shared values of freedom of speech and freedom of expression.”

Stories from the Mountain

Focus on the Faces of Mount Rushmore: Gia Flores-Arellano, Intern & Artist

In 2023, Mount Rushmore National Memorial welcomed Gia Flores-Arellano as its first Latino Heritage Intern, through a national program designed to engage the next generation of park stewards—particularly those from underrepresented communities.

Gia, a senior at the University of Texas at El Paso majoring in art and minoring in museum studies, wasn't sure about applying to the Latino Heritage Internship Program (LHIP) at first. But with some encouragement from a professor—and a deadline looming—she submitted her application. A few weeks later, she accepted an offer to spend the summer at Mount Rushmore, where she quickly found herself immersed in the world of public lands and public engagement.



Rather than working strictly within the arts or museum collections, Gia's internship focused on public affairs and communications. Over 12 weeks, she supported photography and social media, contributed to filming for new park movies, assisted with the Naturalization Ceremony, and collaborated with the Interpretation team on a communications plan for Native American Heritage Month. She also developed a new internal website honoring the park's culture bearers, working closely with Darrell Red Cloud, Sequoia Crosswhite, and Starr Chief Eagle.

"I've always been drawn to cultural heritage," Gia said. "Learning directly from the park's interpreters about the pre-carving era and the traditions that continue today was incredibly meaningful. I even picked up a little Lakota!"

The experience reshaped her career goals. Originally planning to pursue graduate studies and become a museum curator, Gia now hopes to build a career with the National Park Service as a curator or interpreter.

"I've found my element," she said. "I love helping people connect to nature and understand the stories behind these places. Working in a national park allows me to do both."

Thanks to supporters like you, the Mount Rushmore Society proudly helps fund internship opportunities that change lives—and build the future of the National Park Service.

Stories from the Mountain



Art has always been a part of the human experience—used to express emotion, share ideas, and pass down knowledge. It sparks conversations and helps us process the world around us.

Mount Rushmore stands as one of the most iconic works of art in the world—a remarkable fusion of engineering and artistry, especially given the tools available during the Depression era.

While Gutzon Borglum worked in stone, Gia Flores-Arellano expresses herself through abstract oil painting. Her art has become a powerful outlet for personal growth and identity.

“In 2019, I realized how important art had become to me and how it helped me discover myself. I started a small business, Abismo, selling at the local farmers markets where I created t-shirts, earrings, paintings, and other cool stuff. Abismo means “abyss” in English. The abyss symbolizes the darkness that is in me and I bring it to life by creating my artwork. This theme can be seen in my paintings and other pieces.” - Gia Flores-Arellano

Since 1930, **Mount Rushmore Society members** have helped fund vital projects and programs that enhance the visitor experience and preserve the values of the Memorial.

When you join or renew, you become part of a proud tradition of support—and a passionate community that believes in protecting this national treasure for generations to come.

Enjoy member benefits including:

- An exclusive membership card
- Invitations to special events and updates
- The satisfaction of knowing you're making a difference

Join or renew today—because membership matters.

The logo for the Mount Rushmore Society. It features the words "MOUNT RUSHMORE SOCIETY" in a bold, serif font. The text is set against a background of a stylized sunburst or starburst pattern, with rays emanating from a central point at the bottom. The colors are primarily red, white, and blue, evoking a patriotic theme.

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Membership Matters.

Become a Mount Rushmore Society Member today!

Programs with Purpose



A Monumental Summer at Mount Rushmore

Summer 2023 offered visitors to Mount Rushmore far more than just a photo with the Faces—it delivered a season full of educational experiences, cultural connections, and unforgettable moments, thanks in part to the work of dedicated park staff and the generous support of Mount Rushmore Society donors.

From daily ranger-led talks and Sculptor's Studio presentations to youth-focused activities and Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota cultural demonstrations, visitors had countless ways to connect with the Memorial's stories. Each evening culminated in the stirring Evening Lighting Ceremony, a powerful tradition that draws thousands of guests each season.

The Society supported these interpretive efforts by funding the full 2023 cohort of Kay Jorgensen Interns, who worked alongside National Park Service staff to greet visitors, answer questions, and help deliver meaningful programs throughout the summer. These interns played a key role in supporting both everyday park interpretation and special events, including the Naturalization Ceremony and Junior Ranger activities.

To help guests plan their visit, the National Park Service also enhanced its digital tools—including a live summer programming calendar and updated NPS App listings—while maintaining extended hours at the Visitor Center and Sculptor's Studio.

Interpretive programming is at the heart of the national park experience—and your support helps make it stronger.

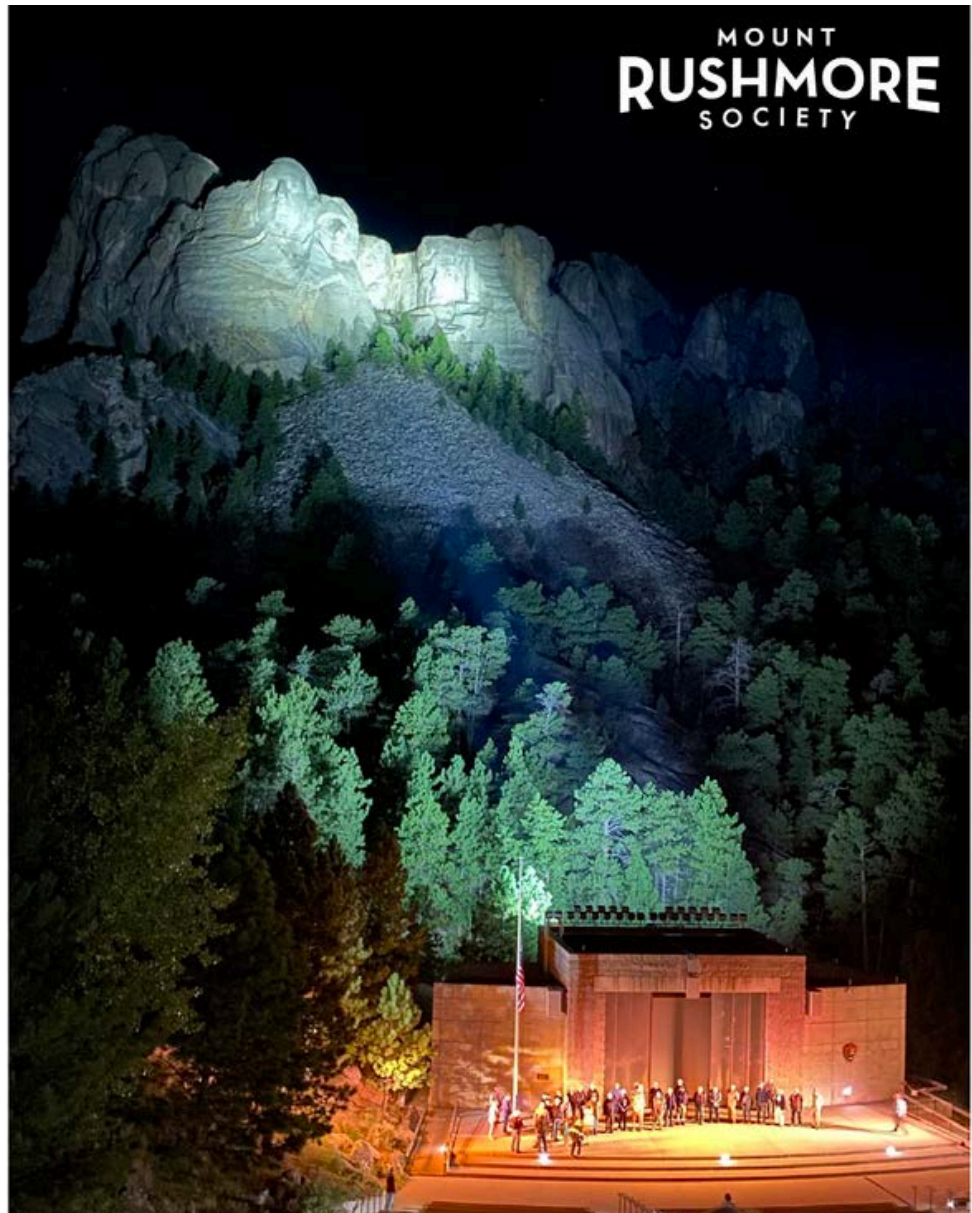
Every donation and every bookstore purchase helps create the kind of meaningful, mission-driven experiences that inspire visitors long after they leave the mountain.

Programs with Purpose

Lighting the Way: A Summer Tradition Continues

From late May through September, thousands of visitors gathered each evening for one of Mount Rushmore's most moving experiences: the Evening Lighting Ceremony.

Led by National Park Service rangers, the program began with a live talk, followed by the film *Freedom: America's Lasting Legacy*. The evening concluded with the retiring of the American flag, the singing of the National Anthem, and the dramatic lighting of the sculpture—a powerful tribute to the values the Memorial represents.



We're proud to support the interpretive programs and personnel that help make this ceremony a highlight of the summer season. Thanks to donor support, these experiences continue to leave a lasting impression on guests from across the country—and around the world.

Pictured above: A photo of the Evening Lighting Ceremony taken by donor Krishna Pendyala during his visit to Mount Rushmore.

New Citizens Take the Oath at Mount Rushmore

Nearly 200 individuals from more than 50 countries became U.S. citizens during the Naturalization Ceremony held at Mount Rushmore National Memorial on June 13, 2023. The annual event, sponsored by the Mount Rushmore Society, honors the ideals of freedom and democracy in a setting unlike any other.



Programs with Purpose

Celebrating Public Lands: 2023 Find Your Park Festival



Originally scheduled for June 10, the Find Your Park Festival was rescheduled due to weather and held on June 24, 2023 at Main Street Square in Rapid City. Despite the rain delay, the event brought together hundreds of visitors for a day of fun, education, and celebration of our public lands.

Organized by the Mount Rushmore Society, the festival showcased national, state, and local parks, along with outdoor-focused nonprofits and tourism partners. Attendees enjoyed ranger talks, environmental games, interactive activities, and opportunities to learn about recreational resources across the Black Hills.

Highlights included the Campers Challenge, a camping-themed relay featuring local celebrities, and the debut of Walk in the Parks—a creative outdoor reading experience centered around Four Famous Faces.

Participating partners included: Mount Rushmore National Memorial · Badlands National Park · Wind Cave National Park · Jewel Cave National Monument · Custer State Park · D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery · Black Hills Parks & Forests Association · Black Hills & Badlands Tourism Association · Xanterra · and others.

Thanks to your support, the Mount Rushmore Society continues to host this community event as a way to connect people of all ages to the public lands we are proud to preserve and promote.



Programs with Purpose

Celebrating Independence at the Shrine of Democracy



Mount Rushmore National Memorial welcomed thousands of visitors on July 3 and 4, 2023 for a two-day celebration of **Independence Day**, filled with educational programming, cultural performances, and patriotic tributes.

The event featured presentations by **presidential re-enactors**, who mingled with guests, gave talks, and signed autographs throughout the day. On the Grand View Terrace, internationally acclaimed hoop dancer **Jasmine Pickner-Bell** performed two vibrant shows each day, while **Sequoia Crosswhite** and **Darrell Red Cloud** shared stories, music, and cultural interpretation at the **Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota Heritage Village**.

The July 3 evening program included remarks from **Superintendent Michelle Wheatley**, a **Junior Ranger ceremony**, a performance by the **U.S. Air Force Academy Band**, and concluded with the **Lakota Flag Song**, the **lighting of the sculpture**, and the **singing of the National Anthem**. The traditional **Evening Lighting Ceremony** took place again on July 4 to close out the celebration.

Thanks to your support, the Mount Rushmore Society continues to fund and promote cultural programming and interpretive experiences that help bring history to life and ensure Mount Rushmore remains a place of reflection, learning, and national pride for all.

Programs with Purpose

Lights, Camera, Mount Rushmore: Film Project Moves Forward

In 2023, the Monumental Movie Campaign made significant strides toward its goal of reimagining the visitor experience at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, the Mount Rushmore Society has provided nearly \$1.4 million to support the creation of two brand-new films for the Memorial's theaters.

Filming began over the summer, with professional crews capturing new footage on location throughout the park. These new films will help tell the story of Mount Rushmore in a more inclusive, engaging, and visually compelling way for millions of future visitors.

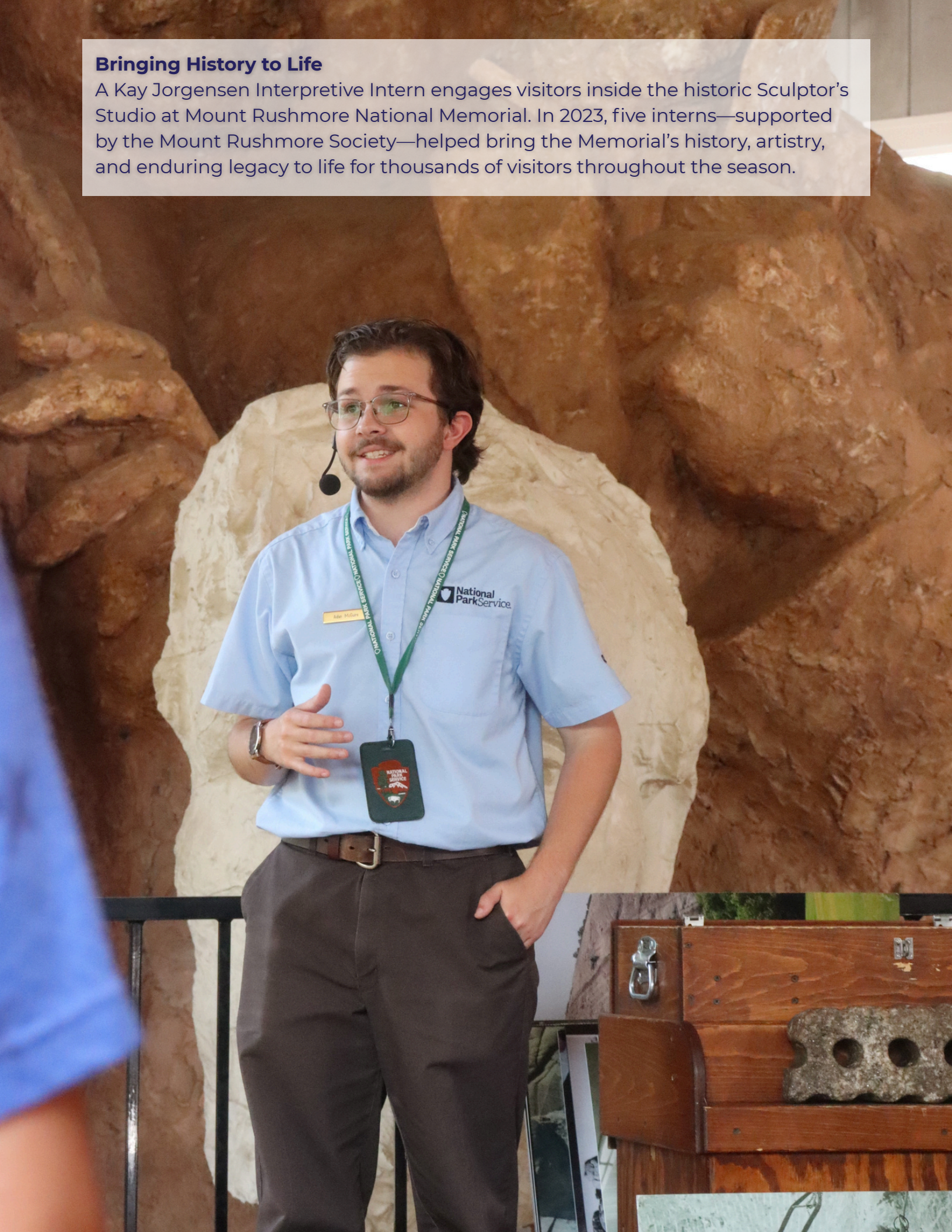
While fundraising continues for additional theater enhancements and technical upgrades, the project remains on track, with both films anticipated to premiere in 2025.

Your support is helping shape how generations to come will experience the Memorial—and we're excited to share a preview of what's ahead.



Bringing History to Life

A Kay Jorgensen Interpretive Intern engages visitors inside the historic Sculptor's Studio at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. In 2023, five interns—supported by the Mount Rushmore Society—helped bring the Memorial's history, artistry, and enduring legacy to life for thousands of visitors throughout the season.



Philanthropy in Action

Honoring Generosity in Stone: 2023 Donor Wall Engraving

In September 2023, the Mount Rushmore Society and the National Park Service unveiled 19 new names engraved on the Grand View Terrace Donor Wall at Mount Rushmore National Memorial—each one representing a generous commitment to preserving and enhancing this iconic site.

Thanks to donor gifts totaling over \$321,000, this year's engraving reflects a powerful tradition of philanthropy that stretches back nearly a century. Every name added to the wall represents not just a financial gift, but a belief in the importance of Mount Rushmore as a symbol of freedom, democracy, and shared heritage.

To celebrate, the Society hosted a Facebook Live broadcast of the unveiling, allowing friends and family across the country to witness the moment in real time. It was a modern way to honor a timeless gesture—and a reminder that while the mountain may be carved in granite, its story continues to grow with each supporter.

Donors who give \$5,000 or more to the Society are eligible for recognition on the Donor Wall after a review process. Names are engraved just once each year, making the annual unveiling a meaningful milestone in the life of the Memorial.

This is your Mount Rushmore. This is your legacy.

The generous contributions of the following for their
impaired Mount Rushmore National Memorial
and future generations.

ELEVATOR

LEONARD B. BORDEN
MURDER
TRENCH
DANGER
ANTHROPOLOGY

PATRIOTS SOCIETY

1910-1911

Dr. John B. Borden

Dr. John B. Borden

Dr. John B. Borden

Dr. John B. Borden

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Retail with a Mission

Frontline Ambassadors, Purposeful Retail: Connecting Every Visitor to the Mission

In 2023, Mount Rushmore Society retail operations did more than offer merchandise—they created opportunities for connection, education, and mission-driven impact. And at the heart of it all were our retail associates, the first impression many visitors had of the Society and our work.

Whether staffing the Mount Rushmore Bookstores, managing the Self-Guided Audio Tour, welcoming travelers at the Memories Gift Shop in the Rapid City Regional Airport, or offering locally inspired merchandise at Memories on Main, our associates served as frontline ambassadors—giving every visitor a chance to support something bigger with every purchase.

The Society also continued its popular Holiday Gift Box program, first launched in 2021, offering local businesses curated gift sets that support the Memorial and showcase South Dakota makers.

One of the year's most significant projects was the remodeling of the Information Center, completed in partnership with the National Park Service. The renovation included:

- New fixtures and displays for the Information Center Bookstore
- A redesigned ranger desk and passport stamp station
- An immersive multimedia wall to enhance storytelling and orientation

These improvements increased accessibility, visitor flow, and engagement, while providing a refreshed space for National Park Service staff and visitors to interact more meaningfully.

Thanks to your support, our team continues to practice retail with a purpose—ensuring every sale supports the mission and every interaction is a chance to inspire stewardship, connection, and pride.

