

MOUNT
RUSHMORE
SOCIETY



2024 Impact Report

Leadership & Legacy



Celebrating 25 Years — Diana Nielsen Saathoff

In April 2024, the Mount Rushmore Society marked a remarkable milestone: **25 years of leadership from Chief Executive Officer Diana Nielsen Saathoff**, whose tenure has shaped the organization into the strong philanthropic partner it is today.

Diana arrived at the Society as it navigated a pivotal era — including the unique responsibility of managing the Mount Rushmore parking garage — and helped guide the organization back to its core mission of supporting Mount Rushmore National Memorial through preservation, education, and engagement.

Over the past quarter-century, the Society has grown in scope and impact. Under Diana's leadership, private philanthropy became a central force in fueling mission-critical work, from expanding interpretive programs and community outreach to creating signature fundraising events that have strengthened stewardship of the Memorial.

Colleagues and partners often note Diana's steady presence through times of transition — from operational shifts and economic challenges to expanding programs that bring Mount Rushmore's stories and ideals to life for millions of visitors each year.

Through long days and big ambitions, her leadership has reflected a deep commitment to collaboration, service, and enduring partnership with the National Park Service.

As the Society looks to the future, Diana's 25-year legacy stands as a testament to the power of thoughtful leadership rooted in purpose.



People Behind the Purpose



Building the First Volunteer Corps at Mount Rushmore

When Eve Phosai talks about “home,” she doesn’t name a place.

“Home is where my mom is,” she says — a reflection of a life shaped by movement, service, and gratitude.

Eve’s father was born in a concentration camp in Laos before his family secured sponsorship from a church in Virginia and immigrated to the United States. He later served in the U.S. State Department. In the Phosai household, education and service were not optional — they were foundational.

By age 15, Eve had begun college coursework through a dual-credit program. At just 19, she will graduate with a degree in History and Strategic Intelligence and is already considering a future in international law.

But first, she chose to serve.

After learning about the Community Volunteer Ambassador (CVA) program during a visit to a National Park Service site, Eve applied to positions across the country. Mount Rushmore was the first to offer her the role.

“It’s the best decision I ever made,” she says.

As the Memorial’s first Community Volunteer Ambassador, Eve was tasked with launching the park’s first formal volunteer program. Over the course of her 12-month engagement, she worked with department leaders to identify needs, built partnerships with local institutions, and developed the framework for a volunteer corps that is now in place.

With more than 2.5 million visitors each year, Mount Rushmore depends on staff, partners, and volunteers alike to steward the site and enhance the visitor experience.

Thanks to the generous support of Mount Rushmore Society donors, Eve’s housing was funded during her service — ensuring that emerging leaders can say yes to opportunities like this.

The faces in granite tell the story of our nation’s past.

Eve — and the volunteers she has recruited — are helping shape its future.

To learn more about how you can volunteer at
Mount Rushmore National Memorial, visit:
<https://www.nps.gov/moru/getinvolved/volunteer.htm>

Investing in the Next Generation of Interpreters

In 2024, the Mount Rushmore Society once again supported the Kay Jorgensen Interpretive Internship Program — one of the most direct ways we promote education and awareness about Mount Rushmore, its history, and the ideals of freedom and democracy.

This summer, five young adults served as Kay Jorgensen Interns, working alongside National Park Service staff during the Memorial's busiest season.

Throughout the summer months, these interns:

- Presented engaging interpretive talks for visitors
- Staffed information desks and answered questions
- Offered informal "roving" interpretation throughout the park

For many of the 2.5 million visitors who come to Mount Rushmore each year, these interns were the voices that helped bring the story behind the sculpture to life.

The program meets a critical operational need by strengthening interpretive staffing during peak visitation. But its impact extends far beyond a single season.

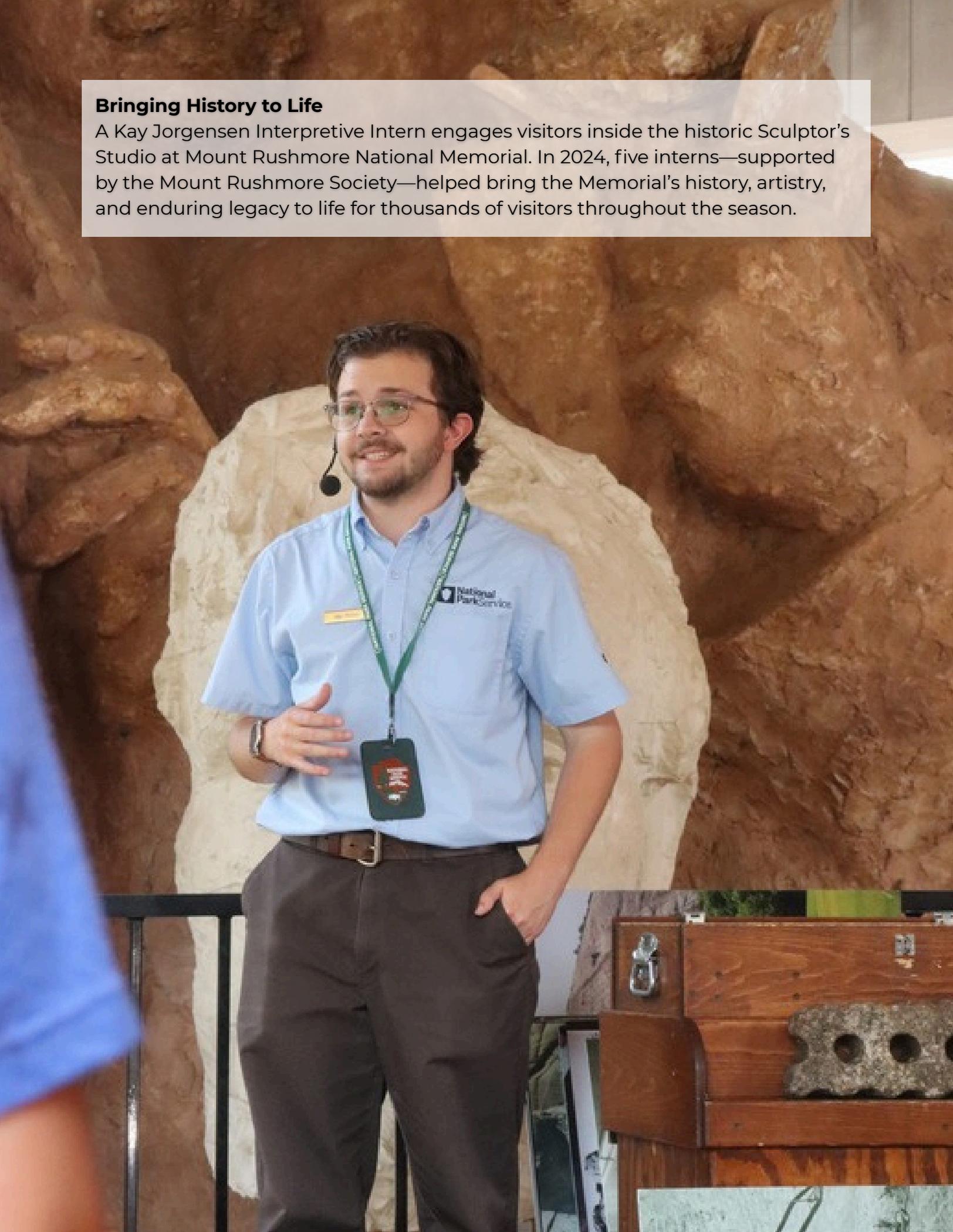
The internship provides invaluable, hands-on experience in a National Park setting — nurturing the next generation of park professionals. In fact, three current full-time interpretive staff members at Mount Rushmore began their careers as Kay Jorgensen Interns.

Through this program, donors are not only supporting education for today's visitors — they are investing in the leaders who will steward this place tomorrow.



Bringing History to Life

A Kay Jorgensen Interpretive Intern engages visitors inside the historic Sculptor's Studio at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. In 2024, 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.



Celebrating Parks, Service, and Community in 2024

National Park Week

In April, Mount Rushmore joined parks across the country in celebrating National Park Week (April 20–28, 2024), a nationwide recognition of the more than 400 national parks and the partnerships that help preserve them.

The week kicked off with a national fee-free day on April 20.* Throughout the celebration, park staff and partners engaged visitors in activities highlighting stewardship, recreation, and the importance of protecting America’s natural and cultural heritage.

*(*Mount Rushmore National Memorial has no entrance fee year-round, only a parking fee.)*

National Park Week serves as a reminder that preservation is a shared responsibility — and that partnerships play a critical role in sustaining our public lands.

National Volunteer Week

During National Volunteer Week (April 21–27, 2024), the Memorial recognized the individuals who generously give their time to support the park’s mission.

With more than 2.5 million visitors annually, volunteer support strengthens operations across museum collections, natural and cultural resources, maintenance, and visitor services. In 2024, the newly established volunteer program expanded opportunities for community engagement and stewardship.

Volunteers are not just helpers — they are partners in preserving the legacy of Mount Rushmore.

Find Your Park Festival

In June, the Society sponsored the Find Your Park Festival at Storybook Island in Rapid City. The community event brought together national, state, and local park partners to connect families with the public lands of the Black Hills.

Through interactive activities and educational booths, the festival helped raise awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities in our region and inspired a new generation to explore — and care for — the places in their own backyard.



Independence Day at Mount Rushmore

Each July 3rd and 4th, the Memorial becomes a gathering place for reflection and celebration.

In 2024, visitors experienced presidential re-enactors, Indigenous performers and storytellers, musical tributes, and special evening programs culminating in the illumination of the sculpture and recognition of veterans.

From sunrise to flag folding on the Grand View Terrace, Independence Day at Mount Rushmore remains a powerful reminder of the freedoms the Memorial represents — and the shared responsibility to protect them.





Lights. Camera. Legacy.

Filming continued throughout 2024 for the Monumental Movie Campaign, capturing new footage and interviews that will reimagine the visitor experience at Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

Funded by nearly \$2 million from the Mount Rushmore Society, two new films are in production and remain on track for a 2025 premiere — ensuring the story behind the stone is told with renewed depth, clarity, and inspiration.



Shared Stewardship

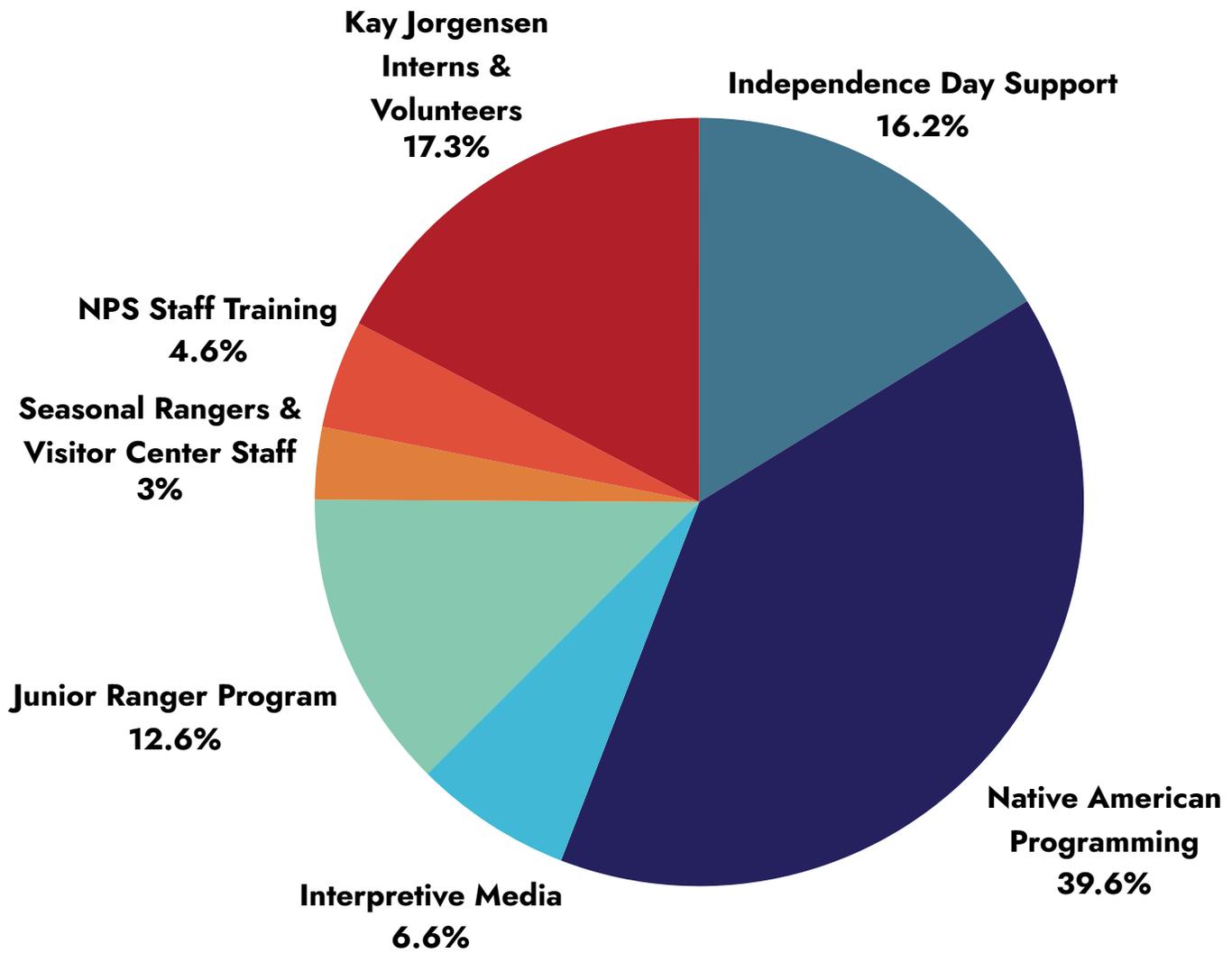
Mount Rushmore is a symbol of American history — but it is also a living place.

In 2024, rangers and cultural partners stood side by side during ceremonies that honor citizenship, service, and shared responsibility. Throughout the summer, visitors also experienced living culture firsthand, as Culture Bearers shared hoop dancing, storytelling, music, and other traditions at the Memorial seven days a week, helping bring Indigenous history and perspectives to life for audiences from across the country.

Through partnership and private support, the Mount Rushmore Society helps ensure that the Memorial remains not only preserved — but meaningful.

Because stewardship is strongest when it is shared.

Retail Proceeds at Work



In 2024, retail proceeds directly supported education, cultural programming, and park stewardship initiatives.

More Than Merchandise

In 2024, Mount Rushmore Society retail operations continued to serve as one of the most visible and mission-driven expressions of our work — even as the year marked a significant transition.

Throughout the year, Society staff welcomed travelers at the Rapid City Regional Airport's Memories Gift Shop, introducing visitors to Mount Rushmore before they ever reached the Black Hills. At the same time, the Mount Rushmore Bookstore remained a cornerstone of on-site engagement at the Memorial.

As part of a strategic refinement of operations, the Society made the decision to conclude airport retail operations at the end of 2024 — allowing resources and staff capacity to be concentrated where mission impact is strongest: at the Memorial itself.

Under the leadership of Retail Director Joe Lopez, the team navigated this transition with clarity and purpose. As airport operations wind down, Kaitlin Verchio will transition fully into the position of Bookstore Manager, bringing her operational experience and frontline insight directly to the Memorial's retail program.

Because at Mount Rushmore, retail is never just retail.

Every purchase in the Bookstores at the Memorial directly supports preservation projects, visitor enhancements, and educational initiatives that go beyond the park's baseline operations. From the Self-Guided Audio Tour to locally inspired merchandise, each transaction is an opportunity to connect visitors more deeply to the story carved in granite.

Our retail associates remain true frontline ambassadors — often the first Society representatives visitors encounter. They answer questions, recommend meaningful keepsakes, guide families toward Junior Ranger materials, and help transform a stop at the register into a moment of connection.

Behind the scenes, their work ensures:

- Revenue that supports critical park projects
- A visitor experience that reflects pride and professionalism
- A seamless partnership with National Park Service staff

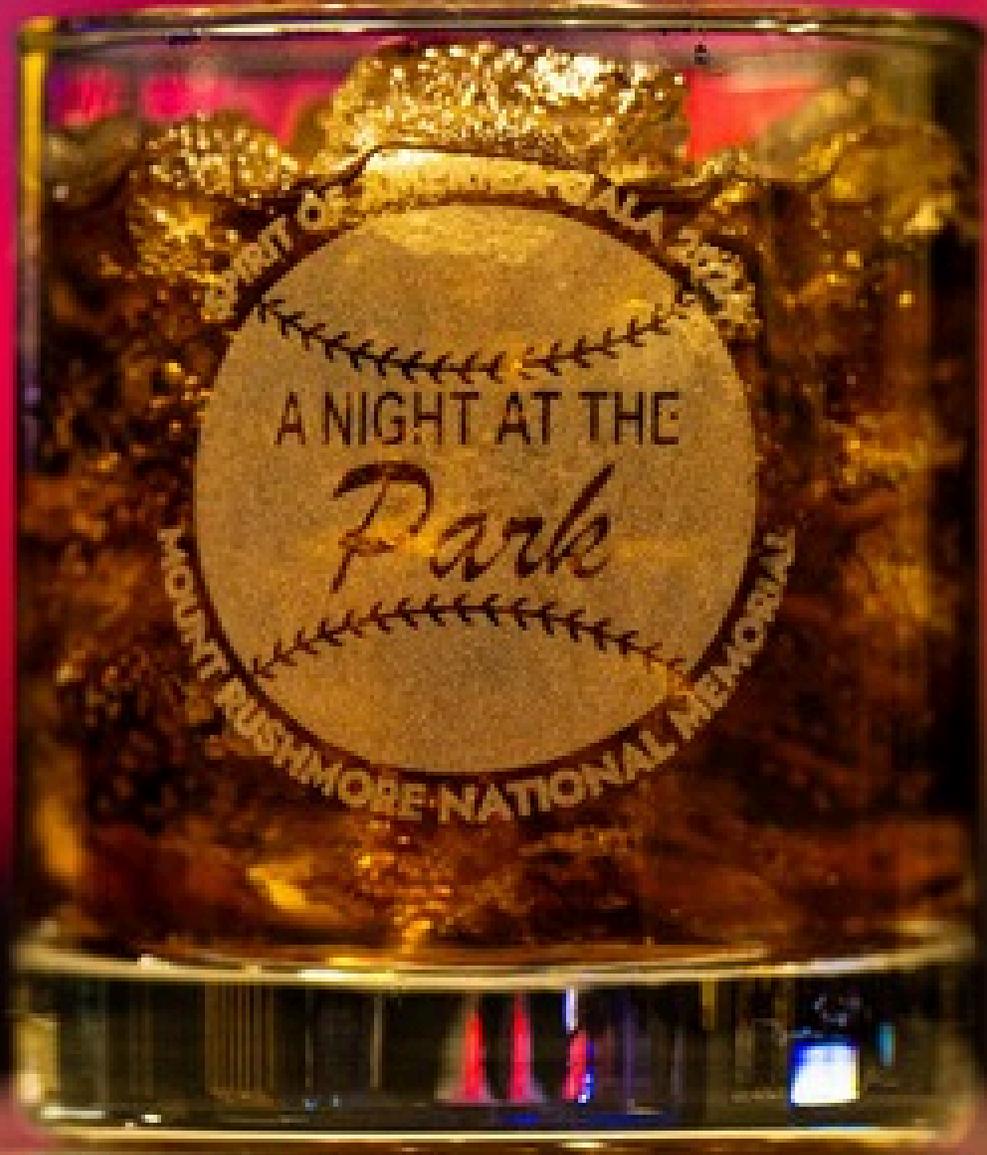
In a year of transition, one thing remained constant: our commitment to purposeful retail.

By refining our focus and strengthening on-site operations, the Society continues to ensure that every sale serves something bigger — protecting, preserving, and promoting Mount Rushmore for generations to come.

Because the true souvenir isn't what visitors carry home.

It's the connection they leave with.

Philanthropy in Action





Spirit of America Gala 2024

A Night at the Park

On October 5, 2024, more than 160 lovers of baseball and steadfast supporters of Mount Rushmore gathered beneath the illuminated sculpture for the third annual **Spirit of America Gala**.

The theme — A Night at the Park — celebrated Mount Rushmore's historic ties to America's pastime, recalling the days when carvers formed a Keystone baseball team and Sunday afternoons meant time on the diamond after time on the mountain.

Under the lights of the sculpture, guests enjoyed an evening that blended storytelling, patriotism, and philanthropy. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist George F. Will reflected on baseball's enduring place in American culture — and its surprising parallels to the ideals represented at Mount Rushmore. Longtime Minnesota Twins announcer Dick Bremer served as emcee, guiding the evening with warmth, humor, and unmistakable love of the game.

But beyond the theme and atmosphere, the purpose was clear.

Together, supporters raised nearly \$140,000 to fund critical programs and projects at Mount Rushmore National Memorial — strengthening education initiatives, preservation efforts, and visitor experience enhancements that go beyond federal funding.

The **Spirit of America Gala** has quickly become the Society's signature fundraising event, bringing together donors, partners, and park leadership for an evening that celebrates not only our nation's history, but our shared responsibility to steward it.

Beneath the granite faces — symbols of leadership, perseverance, and vision — philanthropy once again took center field.

And together, we knocked it out of the park!

Investing in People

Abby Jo (left), whose position as Visual Information Specialist is funded by the Mount Rushmore Society, is helping coordinate the Memorial's new film project.

KayLynn (right), a former Kay Jorgensen Intern, now serves as a full-time ranger — a testament to the lasting impact of the internship program.





Honoring Generosity in Granite

On Friday, September 20, 2024, the Mount Rushmore Society unveiled seven new names on the Donor Wall at the Grand View Terrace — representing \$90,000 in philanthropic support for Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

Three families traveled from across the country to stand beneath the sculpture and witness the unveiling alongside National Park Service staff and Society board leadership. For many, it was their first time seeing their family name etched in stone — a quiet but powerful affirmation of their commitment to this national treasure.

The Donor Wall is more than a recognition space. It is a visible expression of partnership — a reminder that while Mount Rushmore belongs to the American people, its care is strengthened by those who choose to invest in its future.

Each engraved name represents belief:
Belief in preservation.
Belief in education.
Belief in the enduring ideals the Memorial represents.

Since 1930, private philanthropy has helped fund projects and programs that go beyond federal appropriations — supporting interpretive initiatives, cultural programming, visitor experience enhancements, and preservation efforts that keep this place vibrant and relevant.

The faces in granite honor our nation's past.

The names on the wall help sustain its future.

Baseball Beneath the Granite

Long before millions of visitors gathered beneath the faces in granite, the men who carved Mount Rushmore gathered for a different American pastime.

Baseball.

During the late 1930's, carving crews and workers living in Keystone filled their free hours with practices and Sunday afternoon games. What began as recreation became something more organized when Lincoln Borglum — son of sculptor Gutzon Borglum and superintendent of the project — helped sponsor a local team.

“Lincoln Borglum was a great baseball fan and he wanted Mount Rushmore to sponsor the baseball team in Keystone,” recalled Don “Nick” Clifford in Mount Rushmore Q&A. “So in 1938 and 1939 he hired men who were good baseball players and that is how I got the job. We practiced after work and played games on Sunday afternoon.”

The team, made up largely of Rushmore workers, first played as the Keystone team. One of the carvers, Red Anderson, served as manager.

Even amid the dust, dynamite, and demanding precision of carving a mountain, there was room for teamwork of another kind.

In 2024, the Society highlighted this lesser-known chapter of Mount Rushmore’s history — a reminder that behind every monumental achievement are ordinary moments of camaraderie, competition, and community.

The faces in granite represent leadership and legacy.

But on summer evenings in Keystone, it was bats, gloves, and the crack of a baseball that brought the workers together — proving that even in the shadow of history, America’s pastime had a place.





Stories from the Mountain



Preseve. Promote. Protect.