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Fort Stanton Cave Study Project honors two with Caver Hall of Fame awards

by Lynda Sánchez

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Courtesy photo Dr. Ron Lipinski receives a Hall of Fame award from Steve Peerman, project director.



Courtesy photos Dr. Penny Boston with her award.

During the 2012 fall expedition of the FSCSP, two world renowned cavers and scientists were honored for their contributions, expertise, years of dedication, creativity and research to help better understand the unique history and geo-hydrology of world class Fort Stanton Cave. Part of the BLM's National Conservation Area system, this particular NCA was established in 2009 as a result of a major push to preserve the cave and its surroundings after the 2001 breakthrough and discovery of Snowy River Passage.

Each year, according to FSCSP Public Outreach Liaison, Lynda Sánchez, who is also a member of the board of directors, "These selections are made annually and a hand fashioned award is created by Knutt Peterson, a fellow caver from Roswell. Knutt is incredibly gifted artistically and we have asked him to design individual awards for each that feature photos of the honorees and the cave they have supported for decades. Two other volunteers, Karen and Pete Lindsley, do the framing." Sánchez said.

"Having so many dedicated volunteers with a wealth of talent including physicists, engineers, educators, software and microwave engineers and you mix that with the adventuresome spirit that includes everything from DNA sampling, microbiological and geological research, discovery as well as gutsy exploration of unknown territory, well, it is quite a combination."

After a special dinner held at the caver headquarters near Fort Stanton, Steve Peerman, project director, revealed that a number of people were considered and/or nominated and two awards were given this year. The two recent honorees were: Dr. Penny Boston, NM Tech, Socorro; and Dr. Ron Lipinski, Sandia National Labs, Albuquerque.

Peerman stated that, "Dr. Penny Boston has been the pioneer in the study of microbiology associated with Snowy River. She was instrumental in convincing Congress that Fort Stanton

Cave and the surrounding karst region deserved the protection of being identified as a National Conservation Area. Dr. Boston is applying her knowledge of extreme Earth environments to future exploration of extra terrestrial environments. Her research in the famed Naica crystal caves of Mexico and her great respect for the “world beneath our feet” has also added greatly to our knowledge of this vast resource.”

Board President John Corcoran indicated that “Dr. Ron Lipinski has been there during expeditions giving the project 110 percent from cave airflow studies to Ground Penetrating Radar examination of subsurface voids from the earth’s surface. Specifically Dr. Lipinski’s ground breaking Caver Quest visualization program promises to completely overhaul the way that we view and interpret Fort Stanton Cave and perhaps caves in general. Ron brings his amazing skills as sketcher to any survey team and is a great mentor.”

FSCSP volunteers have mapped, surveyed and explored this unusual region for almost five decades! Approximately 20 miles of underground caverns and cave passages, including the now ten mile long Snowy River Passage, have been mapped. Incredible beauty and yet some of the roughest going because of break downs, and meandering and fragile passages have presented challenges at every turn.

The goal is to continue recognizing these contributions and to encourage younger folks to follow in their footsteps. This research and exploration is exciting and every expedition fielded yields incredible results and challenges.

Each year there are three ten-day field expeditions with dozens of volunteers coming from Arizona, Colorado, Texas and New Mexico.

For additional information go to fscsp.org or contact Sánchez at 575-653-4821.

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