

Mack Prichard Lifelong Environmentalist

by Ann Tidwell



Mack Prichard died on April 29, 2020. The world lost a lifelong conservationist. Radnor Lake lost a best friend! Mack was a born naturalist. He combined a jovial personality with a contagious passion for the environment, an amazing memory, and a natural eloquence.

Mack began to influence others very early in life. At 15 years old, he gave a talk in favor of preserving Parkin Mound, an ancient Indian mound in Arkansas. His reasoning convinced the owner of the property to donate the entire site to the state to be preserved. At 16, Mack was hired as a seasonal naturalist at Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park in Memphis. His talent with people and projects promoted him to a succession of increasingly important positions in Tennessee State Parks—first in the State Park Educational Services, and then, when he helped establish the Tennessee Archeology Department, he was appointed to be the first Tennessee State Archeologist.

Throughout his career, Mack worked tirelessly introducing people to the importance of nature. Betty Prichard Dunn was a cousin of Mack's, and when Winfield Dunn was elected governor, Mack began a personal campaign to introduce Gov. Dunn, a fellow Memphian, to the hidden wonders of the Cumberland Mountains, and the necessity of preserving their natural treasures. Mack convinced the busy governor and other leaders to go with him on several hiking and horseback expeditions into the Cumberland wilderness. All were amazed and inspired! These trips led Gov. Dunn to propose the Natural Areas Act, which would forever preserve treasured landscapes. The act was signed four months after Gov. Dunn's inauguration in the spring of 1971. Mack Prichard was chosen to lead this new division identifying, procuring and administering these sites.

Two years later, when Radnor Lake was to be drained and the surrounding land developed into subdivisions, Mack met with concerned citizens who formed the Radnor Lake Preservation Fund. The group held many strategy meetings, met with the governor, Congressional and General Assembly leaders, conservation groups and many others. The group had but a few weeks to raise in excess of \$3 million, a huge amount in 1973. The day before the deadline, we made it. With federal, state and private donors responding, we "Saved Radnor Lake!"

Ever since, Mack was one of Radnor Lake's strongest and most constant supporters. He served on the first board of advisors and continued to be an active advisor until his death. He was a prepared and forceful speaker whenever asked. He not only came to countless meetings, art shows and award ceremonies, he always came with his camera, documenting the occasion for posterity. Friends of Radnor Lake honored him with a well-deserved Environmentalist of the Year Award.

Other environmental groups benefited from Mack's time, influence and advice. He was a founder of the Tennessee Trails Association, Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association, and Cumberland River Compact. He was a longtime board member of the South Cumberland Regional Land Trust and Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation (now TennGreen Land Conservancy). For decades, as Tennessee's State Naturalist, Mack traveled the state, speaking, meeting and always entertaining and inspiring. As Randy Hedgepath so eloquently said, "Everyone who loves the natural beauty, biological diversity and fascinating history of Tennessee owes a debt of gratitude to Mack Prichard!"

