

February 28, 2020

Deb Aaron
President, Kansas Anthropological Association
PO Box 750962
Topeka, Kansas 66675-0962

Dear President Aaron:

I am writing to nominate Virginia Wulfkuhle for the Kansas Anthropological Association's Lifetime Service Award.

I first met Virginia when I was hired at the Kansas Historical Society. I started on June 1, 2000, two days before the beginning of the Kansas Archeology Training Program field school at Old Fort Ellsworth, 14EW26. After settling in a little bit, I visited the field school. I was surprised by what I saw. I had been working in archeology for 22 years but only rarely had seen an operation as large as the KATP field school. In addition, most of the people working were volunteers, nearly all of them non-professionals. A couple of things struck me. First was the dedication of the people that were working. Second was that someone had recruited all of these people, had organized all of this equipment, had made all of the arrangements, had directed all of these people, and that everything seemed to be under control. Virginia Wulfkuhle was a key member in the team that made all of that work.

Once the field school was over and everyone came home, I got a chance to get to know Virginia. It became clear that she was different from what I typically expected from an archeologist. In my mind, there were two kinds of archeologists—those that were field oriented, focused primarily on finding and excavating archeological sites; and academics, those who were focused on research and publication. Working with Virginia made me create a third category—archeologists that focused on sharing archeology with the public. I had always been interested in grassroots initiatives, in big projects carried out by public volunteers, but it never occurred to me that archeology, too, could be a grassroots initiative. Virginia was working with the KAA with great determination to do just that.

Virginia was doing more than running a field school a couple of weeks out of the year. She was working with all of the divisions at the Kansas Historical Society—and divisions is the right word, the divisions were pretty divided at that time—to get archeology into educational materials, to get our reports properly archived, to work with the museum to make sure that the artifacts being displayed were presented correctly. It seemed like she was everywhere, because she was. But it was more than Virginia doing a lot at the Historical Society. She was constantly going to meetings, constantly initiating and supporting projects, constantly creating posters, brochures, traveling trunks, giving talks.

What I didn't know was that was only part of her professional life. Another very big part, and the part that took me a while to see, was the Kansas Anthropological Association. It took a couple of years, a couple of field schools, a couple of KAA board meetings to start to realize that the KAA was something much more influential than I had expected. A substantial amount of the archeological work in the state, and a substantial amount of the archeological reporting was being done by the KAA! They had a journal, and Virginia was the editor starting in 1993 (and still is 27 years later). The journal was, and is, filled with Kansas archeology.

Being an editor is tough. You have to decide what should and should not be published, and sometimes you have to say no to someone (who you probably know) who wants their manuscript in print. You have to tell people that their writing could be better, and if you're willing to put in the work, you help them with their writing. You have to read every article four, five, six times, have to work with layout, have to work with printers, have to get the journals mailed out. It takes a lot of time. On top of a full-time job, Virginia did all of this, and she did it, and is still doing it, as a volunteer. I think she's doing it because she believes in the KAA, and because the journal—The Kansas Anthropologist—is a living record of the accomplishments of the KAA and also is a conduit for archeological information that most of us would not see otherwise.

Virginia has chosen to live in two worlds as an archeologist—professional and amateur—and has done so with great success. The distinction between professional and amateur archeologists is not fair. There are amateur archeologists with levels of knowledge that meet or exceed that of some professionals. There are amateur archeologists that can excavate better and more quickly than professionals, and who are willing to work harder and longer. Still, there is a line between amateur and professional archeologists, and Virginia chose to straddle it. As long as I have known Virginia, she has been an adamant supporter of the KAA. It wasn't always easy. I suspect management at the Historical Society sometimes wondered if Virginia's loyalties were with the agency or with the KAA. That is a difficult position to maintain, and it would have been a lot easier for Virginia to back down when perceived conflicts of interests arose. She didn't and managed to be a strong advocate for the KAA-Kansas Historical Society partnership and maintain civil relationships all the while.

Virginia could have taken the role as an advisor to the KAA, but instead chose to participate as both a member and a leader. Furthermore, her leadership style is not to dominate but instead to work as a colleague, as an equal member of the Board of Directors. That shows a strong level of commitment to the organization. This is important not only to make sure that the KATP field school remains a successful activity, but to work through other difficult issues such as the policies, finances, and bylaws of the organization. It would be easy to leave those tasks to others and then critique the results. Virginia has chosen to be involved in guiding policies and structure for critical KAA programming such as the field school and the certification program.

It's easy to make the case that Virginia has been an advocate and an activist for the KAA. It's also important to note that she has been a friend to the KAA and has forged strong friendships with individual KAA members. This, I believe, is an indication of her sincerity and commitment and thus I believe her dedication and work should be recognized by giving her a Lifetime Service Award.

With best regards,



Robert J. Hoard
State Archeologist, Kansas Historical Society

July 2020

Deb Aaron, President Kansas Anthropological Association
PO Box 750962
Topeka, KS 66675-0962

Dear KAA President and Executive Board,

Bob Hoard wrote a wonderful letter of nomination for Virginia Wulfkuhle to receive the newly created Lifetime Service Award from the Kansas Anthropological Association. Virginia's service to the KAA has been impressive beyond compare. Even though her award was approved months ago, I would like to add a few more points to Dr. Hoard's glowing words.

When Certification Chair I worked with Virginia to enhance the Certification program through the Winter Seminars. These were specifically to help members take all the required classes for the different categories of Certification. Virginia kept track of the rotation of core classes during KATP and the Seminars, so that people would have a greater chance of completing requirements in a timely way. She made valiant efforts to secure qualified instructors for these classes. She also mentored KAA members working through their Certification requirements, and even helped some reconstruct past activities at KATP so that these might be documented in their records.

Virginia always participated fully in KATP, including attending evening events and programs after a hard day's work, and often before a late night of preparation for the next day. She kept company with us amateurs, lifting us up to companionable friendship greatly treasured.

Virginia was instrumental in writing the nomination of our KATP program to the SAA (Society of American Archeology) for Excellence in Public Education, which KAA received to great acclaim.

Besides being editor for The Kansas Anthropologist, Virginia has chaired the Publications Advisory Committee, and was largely responsible for the writing of several Historic Preservation Fund grant proposals, enabling the publication of TKA after our previous publication partnership failed.

Our local Mud Creek chapter has depended on Virginia for many years to assist with identifications at our Artifact ID Day events. She has given up many days and traveled many miles to help us with public outreach.

I'm sure many others would be able to give further examples of Virginia's outstanding service to KAA. She is truly a "rock star" among us.

With sincere support for this Lifetime Service Award,


Rose Marie Wallen
KAA Past President