

# Rudolph Wendelin

Rudolph Wendelin was born February 27, 1910 in Herndon, Kansas. He grew up in Ludell, Kansas, then attended the University of Kansas School of Architecture, and art schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Washington, D.C.

Mr. Wendelin joined the Forest Service in Milwaukee in 1933 and transferred to Washington in 1937. Following World War II service as a Navy artist, he resumed his Forest Service career as the man in charge of Smokey Bear, whom the Forest Service had come up with in 1945 as its "spokesman" in the fight against wildfires. The bear's slogan, "Remember, Only You Can Prevent Wildfires," became one of the most familiar and imitated of all time.

Under Mr. Wendelin's guidance, the bear changed. What had originally been a baby bear and then a full-grown animal with long snout, fangs and fearsome claws became a bear with more human features. By the 1950s, the bear sported a ranger's hat and belted bluejeans. His paws had become hands, in which he always carried a shovel, to better protect America's forests.

The bear's demeanor, while never fearsome, was always as solemn as his job and message. He seemed to move with ponderous dignity and spoke slowly in a deep and powerful voice -- a TV voice that belonged to longtime WMAL radio personality Jackson Weaver.

Mr. Wendelin, in a 1995 interview with The Washington Post, said that Smokey's influence could be compared with that of the animals in Aesop's fables and that his message was as old as the Bible itself.

Smokey's popularity under Mr. Wendelin's guidance was undeniable. He appeared on government posters, postage stamps and television. He also appeared in magazines, "spoke" on the radio and was used in various teaching materials. He even appeared in a movie. The government also licensed his likeness for use on such commercial products as school lunch boxes.

Eventually, his popularity reached the point where he was awarded his own Zip code, 20252.

Mr. Wendelin oversaw Smokey's activities until he retired from the Forest Service in 1973. A sculptor, he designed government awards. He also designed five commemorative U.S. postage stamps and co-designed a sixth.

He was a 38-year member of the Washington Society of Landscape Painters and a member of Community Church of Washington.

In retirement, Mr. Wendelin continued to be associated with Smokey. He drew calendars and sketched illustrations for a book featuring the bear. The 1995 Post story noted that his home featured Gold Smokey and Silver Smokey Forest Service awards for his work in fire prevention and that his sun porch featured a life-size "stuffed" Smokey.

Rudolph A. Wendelin, 90, died Aug. 31, 2000 at the Iliff nursing home in Falls Church. He lived in Arlington.

He died as a result of injuries he received Aug. 18 in an automobile accident on Interstate 64 in Norfolk. He was in the Norfolk area visiting family.

