

# LEGACIES

By Natalie Taylor, Donor Relations Manager

## Kenneth L. Cashdollar provides for Meadowcroft's future



Ken Cashdollar, a member of the Senator John R. Heinz History Center since 1996, passed away in March 2009, leaving a generous bequest of more than \$83,000 to the Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village. Meadowcroft, a site of the History Center in Washington County, and now National Historic Landmark, offers visitors a glimpse of life 16,000 years ago in addition to educational programming and hands-on experiences.

Ken grew up in a rural area near Mars, Pa. The middle child of Grace and Chester Cashdollar (he had an older brother, Charles, and younger sister, Jean), Ken was the “family scientist” from an early age. He carried a rock hammer on family outings to collect specimens, explored the nearby hills with his cousin Paul, created colorful concoctions with a chemistry set, and laid on his back watching for meteor showers on clear summer nights. At Mars High School, he won the Bausch & Lomb Science Prize, and at Dickinson College excelled as a physics major and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

After two years of alternative service as a conscientious objector with a National Institute of Health project at Yale University, Ken entered graduate study in astronomy at the

University of Wisconsin-Madison. Eventually concluding that employment opportunities in astronomy would be scarce, he redirected his graduate studies into optics and related fields of physics at Wisconsin and later at the University of Pittsburgh.

In 1973, he went to work for the U.S. Bureau of Mines research facility south of Pittsburgh, beginning a 35-year career at what is now the Pittsburgh Research Laboratory, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Ken’s areas of research included laboratory and large-scale explosion hazard studies and the development of equipment for explosibility testing—research efforts that continue to have far-reaching safety benefits both to miners and petro-chemical workers.

Recognized nationally and internationally for his expertise on dust and gas explosions, Ken produced more than 100 technical publications. He was a key member of the NIOSH special team that responded to the request of the Mine Safety and Health Administration and the West Virginia Office of Miners’ Health Safety and Training to assist in their investigation of the Sago Mine explosion in January 2006.

Outside the laboratory, Ken had extensive and varied interests. He was a photographer of near-professional quality. He was a trumpeter in his high school band and a tenor in his church choir. In college, he learned to play guitar, and over the years amassed an encyclopedic knowledge of folk and Celtic music groups and performers. He went whitewater rafting, played in a volleyball league, and scanned the heavens with his Celestron eight-inch telescope. Nothing gave him more pleasure than hiking in the state parks of West Virginia; he earned an official walking stick for his first 100 miles and then quit counting.

Ken’s gift is a wonderful reflection of his own interest in nature and science. His bequest is a legacy that will allow future generations to benefit from the unique educational experiences that Meadowcroft provides and helps to ensure the future of this important historical site.



For information about including the Heinz History Center, Meadowcroft, or Fort Pitt in a will or estate plan, please contact Natalie Taylor at [ngtaylor@heinzhistorycenter.org](mailto:ngtaylor@heinzhistorycenter.org) or (412) 454-6325.

**A girl tries using a pump drill with a flint bit as part of the Woodland Encounter program at Meadowcroft’s 16th-century indian village.** Photo by Meadowcroft staff.

