

# ‘Jim Ersfeld worked quietly in the background’

## WWA Assistant Director Posthumously Receiving Honor

**By Ollie Reed Jr.**

Branding Iron Awards are presented to WWA members who have given exceptional service to the organization.

Of the six Branding Irons previously awarded, three

went to former WWA presidents, one to the WWA’s first executive director, one to the then-*Roundup* editor and the other to one of the organization’s longest serving and most ardently supportive members.

This year, however, the Branding Iron Award goes to a man who worked with as much devotion, diligence and determination as any WWA member, but who did his job off stage and – tragically – over much too brief a time.

WWA Assistant Director Jim Ersfeld, this year’s recipient, died of cancer November 1, 2011, in Albuquerque. He was 62.

“As with any organization, it is often the people who are not in front of the room who are very important to the ongoing operation,” says Candy Moulton, WWA executive director and a past recipient of the Branding Iron.

“Jim Ersfeld worked quietly in the background for the five years Paul Hutton served as executive director of WWA. He managed office records, answered questions from members and others, served as Spur Awards chairman and provided support to the board. The only regret in awarding him the Branding Iron is that Jim is not here to accept it himself.”

The WWA board also voted to name the organization’s Homestead College Student Fellowship after Ersfeld. That’s particularly appropriate because Ersfeld was a graduate student in history at the University of New Mexico. He was the top hand on a crew of UNM history grad students who assisted then-Executive Director Hutton, a UNM history professor, with his WWA duties.

Meg Frisbee, a former UNM grad student who now teaches at New Mexico State University, remembers Ersfeld’s work ethic and his staunch support of UNM’s history department.

“I counted on finding him at his desk [in Hutton’s UNM office] when I was leaving the building in the early evening, and I was seldom disappointed,” Frisbee said. “Outside of his commitments to WWA, he contributed to the history department at large. He was a regular at commons room talks, supporting other graduate students with

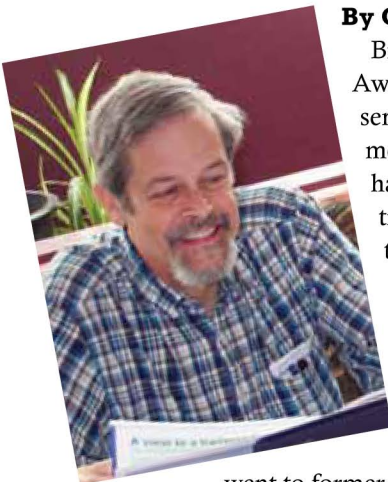
his presence and analyzing, always with praise, the work of faculty and visiting scholars.”

Former UNM grad student Elaine Nelson, now teaching at the University of Minnesota-Morris, recalls how Ersfeld’s insistence on finding the subtle humor in any situation helped her cope with the graduate classes they shared.

When Nelson married former UNM grad student Kent Blansett in 2010 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Ersfeld surprised the couple by arriving at their wedding just as the service was about to start.

“This made our day,” says Blansett, also now teaching at the University of Minnesota-Morris. “We were surprised that Jim had made such a long journey just to celebrate our wedding with us. He was a devoted friend.

“It seemed as though our conversation never reached an end.”



*Jim Ersfeld, pictured at left with, from left Elaine Nelson, Kent Blansett, Paul Hutton, Steve Law and Jason Strykowski at the Springfield, Missouri, convention. Courtesy of Elaine Nelson. Courtesy of Elaine Nelson*