

NARRAGANSETT, R.I. – If you have visited Narragansett Town Beach in the last 26 years there are two things you can be certain of; First, experiencing one of the premiere beaches in New England, and second, the warm, familiar presence of Frank Eldredge. However, for many it is really the latter that makes the former.

Frank is as symbolic to the beach as the Towers are to Narragansett. A lifelong resident of Rhode Island, he began his career at the beach in 1993, his first summer of retirement, and initially handled the office finances. However, it was not long before he was moved up to manage the North Pavilion and Cabana areas, and he has been a staple there for the better part of the last two decades.

Now, at 92 years young, Eldredge continues to work at the beach every summer. He man's his post down in Cabana lot: greeting the locals, directing the lost out-of-towners, carrying on the daily maintenance and doing so with a constant smile.

"He is our ambassador of the beach particularly in the Cabana area," said Steve Wright, the Director of Parks and Recreation. "Frank knows all of our patrons by their first and last names and greets them daily with a huge smile. And he not only says hello, but asks about their day, their children, life, and jobs. When he works alongside a young 16-18-year-old beach attendant, he has them smiling all day. He actually teaches them how to interact with the public by his own actions."

But what keeps him coming back after all these years?

"It's the people," Eldredge said, "the people I work with, the people I have met and continue to meet. You can learn a lot from young adults, we grew up in a different time and it's interesting to talk to them. I've met some interesting people here, from all walks of life with different thoughts and attitudes. I'm still friendly with a priest that I met 20 years ago at the beach. I try to come here even on my days off. It's never been about money, it's something to do, I've always loved the beach."

Frank's favorite time of day is first thing in the morning when the sand is pristine, absent of even a single footprint. He wishes more people would come at that time to experience that.

The quintessential "guy that knows everyone", Frank is beloved by coworkers, former coworkers, and patrons alike. A day does not go by when at least one person wanders into the office of the North Pavilion, or swings into the Cabana lot and asks, "Hey, is Frank around?"

Katie Riordan, an attendant who has worked the Cabana lot with Frank, recently had one of these such encounters.

"I was working in the Cabana lot and a man drove up who was from New York and asked for Frank," said Riordan. "I had to tell him that Frank wasn't here, because Mondays are one of his days off and the man said, 'well tell him a day without Frank is like a day without sunshine'."

Frank is a listener and a storyteller. He earns your respect and admiration by listening to your stories, troubles, complaints, and relating back to you with his wealth of experiences. This is how Frank has connected with so many people, even those many years his junior.

"Frank is fantastic; he always helps you have a good time when you're out here," said Suriya

Hamidzada, another attendant. "He tells you stories about his life, his wife, his time in the war, he's had a crazy life, and it makes you a lot more comfortable with him. He's telling you about when he was your age."

It isn't just story time at the beach though; Frank expects you to work. He instructs his workers to smile, say "Thank you" not "thanks", and to always say "Good bye, have a nice day" or "Hope to see you back again tomorrow".

"I want them to work and do things correctly, and they know it," said Eldredge. "But one of my favorite words is flexible. If one of the young adults wants to change their lunch hour or change something and I can do it, I do it. That costs me nothing."

It's about respect. Respect the job and respect others.

"Very simply put, everyone loves and respects Frank," said Scott Hassell an Assistant Manager of the Beach. "They marvel at his energy level for his years. Frank gets more work out of the kids than anyone else and they still love to work with him in Cabanas."

"Frank is a true gentleman," said Wright. "It is a pleasure to know and work with him. Frank has an overwhelming charm for life and enjoys communicating with people of all ages. Frank is an inspiration to all of the employees at Narragansett Town Beach. His positive attitude with his huge smile is contagious."

Outside of the job, Frank keeps to a daily routine. He wakes up by 6 a.m., every day, and never leaves the house without breakfast; he attends Catholic mass regularly and enjoys walking and reading. In his own words, he tries to "keep busy."

To "keep busy", for the last five years Frank has also volunteered for Friends in Service to Humanity (FISH), a volunteer community program that helps provide transportation for people to medical, social services, and dental appointments.

In talking with Frank, one thing he said about his outlook on life that speaks greatly to his character was that "little things mean a lot."

If there was one way to sum up Frank Eldredge that could be it. Whether it's his smile and politeness or that he remembers your name, and your kids' names and where they go to school. That he can recount the story of your great uncle who he knew down the street growing up in Providence (odds are he knows someone in your family- that's just Rhode Island!). That he has covered for your lunch break or given you advice on life. One time, Frank let a woman from Kansas, with no beach pass or parking sticker, park quickly in Cabana lot so that she could see the ocean for the first time. These little acts add up, and leave an indelible mark on the people who have crossed paths with him.

Frank speaks about not taking things for granted. That Narragansett is a gorgeous beach community, that he has a loving and caring family around him, and that he has his health.

It would require volumes to recount every tale of Frank at the beach, or convey his whole life's story. For that, if you like, take a drive down to the beach, maybe on an early morning before anyone has set foot on the sand, and there you will find Frank, diligently preparing for your arrival and you can ask him for yourself. And with a smile, he would gladly tell you his tales.

The beach is a treasure for the town, but the beach's treasure, is Frank Eldredge.