

Remembering Jim Zim

He deserves a place among the state's great ecologists.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

We were up in Door county the other weekend attending a memorial service for ecologist Jim Zimmerman, who died last fall of a heart attack.

The service was held at the Clearing in Ellison Bay and arranged by Jim Zim's friends in the Door County Environmental Council, for which Jim Zim served as an adviser and consultant. The highlight was probably artist James Ingwersen's unveiling of his portrait of Jim Zim, which captured the wood sprite look that was so

familiar to everyone who ever encountered Dr. James Hall Zimmerman.

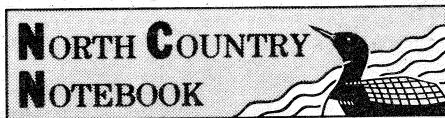
It was an elfin look, the head tilted in that birdlike way that reminded you of a woodpecker poised on the tree trunk, listening for grubs and beetles just beyond the bark, the eyes, bright, sparkling, full to the brim, not only with wisdom but overflowing with fun.

Ingwersen painted the portrait from a photograph of Jim Zim taken by Madison writer-photographer David Tenenbaum, whose work appears often in Isthmus. His photograph illustrated a memorial column on Jim Zimmerman that appeared in this very space last October.

When Ingwersen unveiled his portrait, there was oohing and aahing from the assemblage as people recognized their lost friend. Jim's wife, Libby, who had covered a table with pictures

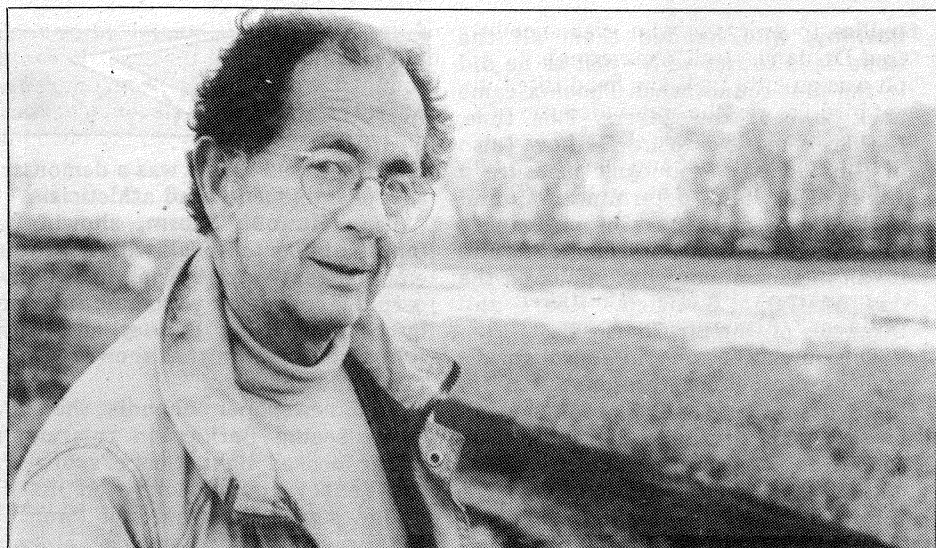
of Jim, was, I think, comforted by Jim's luminous portrait on the easel. It was as though a window had been undraped and there was the same old constant sun—still there, still warming our chill lives like a stove.

The portrait will hang at the Miller



Art Center during the wildlife exhibit that opened June 20. After that, Jim Zim's friends hope his portrait will find a permanent home in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame located at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

In the Hall of Fame, Jim Zim would join the company of the country's great



DAVID TENENBAUM

Jim Zimmerman: His elfin look was filled with wisdom and fun.

environmentalists—John Muir, Sigurd Olson and Jim Zimmerman's beloved teacher, the immortal Aldo Leopold.

The tributes from Jim Zim's friends that weekend were touching and personal. Karen Wilson read a nature poem by Dr. Larry Giles that Dr. Giles had read at a memorial service in Madison's Unitarian Meeting House last October. Her husband, John, in his own way, got poetic, too.

"Jim was never enervated by criticism," John Wilson said. "He had the ability to laugh at otherwise crushing frustrations—the cosmic absurdity of human beings strutting their stuff and playing out their brief moments as if they were immortal." Wilson even zinged Jim's flinty employer, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for not

came up with little packets of goodies, neatly wrapped in waxed paper and loaded with energy, not to mention innovation.

One of Jim's more impressive field snacks was a packet of dates from which he had surgically removed the pits and in which he had then stuffed dollops of peanut butter. Steady Eddy thinks that would be just the thing for an outing on the Catfish Flats. "Whatever you don't eat," Steady concludes, "the catfish will. Beats raw chicken livers."

One of the prime movers attempting to place James Ingwersen's portrait of Jim Zimmerman in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame at UW-Stevens Point is Gregory D. Armstrong, director of the UW Arboretum in Madison.

In his nomination letter proposing Jim Zim for the Hall of Fame, Armstrong concludes with this paragraph:

"Dr. James H. Zimmerman loved the natural world very much. Through his life's effort, he cared for and protected the natural qualities of many areas in Wisconsin, and he inspired many of Wisconsin's fellow citizens to understand what an appropriate relationship with nature should be. Surely, he was one of Wisconsin's great environmentalists."

In his supporting letter, Chuck Pils, director of the DNR's Bureau of Endangered Resources, writes: "Many of our bureau personnel have taken courses and field trips with Jim and have been greatly influenced by him. Some bureau personnel considered Jim the best naturalist in the state."

In her supporting letter, Evelyn Howell wrote on behalf of the UW-Madison's department of landscape architecture: "Jim was one of the best field instructors it has been my pleasure to know. He could name almost any plant or animal encountered on a field trip and had the knack of getting students to speculate about the history of a site by 'reading the landscape'.... Jim was almost a Pied Piper, inspiring

many to pursue careers in conservation."

There are other supporting letters—from Cal DeWitt, UW professor in the Institute of Environmental Studies; Cliff Germain, retired from the DNR; Peter McKeever, state director of the Nature Conservancy; and Jerry Viste, executive director of the Door County Environmental Council.

"People ask," Jerry Viste says, "who will replace Jim Zimmerman as consultant and adviser on ecological matters for DCEC. We have to respond that there is no one to replace him."

Say amen, somebody. ■

George Vukelich reads selections from North Country Notebook Sunday nights at 11:30 on Wisconsin Public Radio, WHA (970AM).

Friends hope that Jim's portrait will find a permanent home in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

granting Jim Zim tenure "although he served the university and his state all his life." Wilson speculated that was because "Jim was a field man and teacher, not a researcher."

Naturalist Roy Lukes confided that his friendship with Jim Zimmerman dated back to 1955 and they had spent a lot of time in the field together.

"If service," Roy Lukes declared, "is the rent we pay to live on this earth, Jim's rent was paid up for years to come."

Roy recalled how Jim never seemed to carry along a lunch on their field trips. No special bag. No special sack. "The first time we went out," Roy confessed, "I thought it was going to be a long, hungry day for him."

But at lunch time, Jim poked around in the recesses of his field jacket and