**The LCTHF mourns the passing of longtime member Don Peterson.** He was a leader of the Portage Route Chapter (PRC) and an authority on Lewis and Clark in central Montana. Don's wife Cherie related a brief history of Don's life to Lee Ebeling, Harry Mitchell, and Bill Bronson at her home on January 8, 2021, which Lee recorded as follows:

Don was born on June 17, 1945, in New Rockford, ND, to Norwegian parents. His family moved to Great Falls when Don was about five years old. He was graduated from Great Falls High School in 1963 and attended College of Great Falls. After working briefly for Safeway markets, Don took a position with the Montana Air National Guard (MANG). During his 30-year career there, Don served in munitions, missiles, base supply, and as communications head. He retired as a major from MANG, having been a dual military and civilian employee.

Don met his wife Cherie on a blind date in 1963. They were married in October 1965 and have two children, Eric of Lake Bay, WA, and Beth of Great Falls, and several grandchildren. Don also operated a Lewis and Clark tour business in Great Falls for many years. Having begun his Lewis and Clark affiliation in 1991, he wrote two books and many articles on the Lewis and Clark story in Great Falls and filled in as the LCTHF's interim executive director during a transition period. At the time of his passing, Don was a member of the PRC Board of Directors. He attended many LCTHF annual meetings and almost never missed a PRC or Lewis and Clark Honor Guard function in Great Falls. Don had many hobbies, as well. He loved to go fishing, build fly rods, and collect local rocks and arrowheads. He also built an addition to his home, made his own jewelry including his homemade Montana bola ties, and was a member of the Order of the Arrow in the Boy Scouts.

We asked Don's friends to share their reminiscences with our readers.

**Gary E. Moulton** was the first to respond. Here's his memory of Don.

Don was our local tour guide when I was the historian-at-hand for groups coming through Great Falls around the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition's Bicentennial. I was amazed at his breadth of knowledge about the Corps of Discovery in the area, but it did surprise me that he could readily recite all the colorful adjectives that writers used for the ever-present pests, the mosquitoes. I'm sure he could also recount every variation in spelling. I came to believe that if Don Peterson didn't know of an expedition event at Great Falls, then it simply didn't happen. A trip to Great Falls will be a little lonely without Don.
Harry Mitchell said that one of Don Peterson’s favorite sites was the Lewis and Clark Pass.

Don always started his comments (or lecture) on the Lewis and Clark Pass by pointing out the error in its title. Since Clark was not there, Don thought it should be just Lewis Pass. Don loved to remind everyone of the Corps’ mission and activities: Clark (and about one half of the Corps) were to explore south—the Yellowstone River drainage area, and Lewis (and his group) were to explore north—the Missouri River drainage area. Don often said if the total Lewis and Clark Trail is about 8,000 miles, about one third of it is located in Montana. The best example of the numerous trails taken by the Corps was on July 27, 1806, when the Corp was in five different locations—all within current-day Montana.

Beverly Lewis, LCTHF Library and Archives Committee Chair, recalled that Don went beyond being a “keeper” of the Story because he enthusiastically shared the Story with everyone.

Don was more than just a friendly voice on the phone when you called the LCTHF office in Great Falls; he was also the knowledgeable voice who provided you with the information you requested. He was dedicated to the LCTHF, and to the Portage Route Chapter, and he spent many volunteer hours sharing the Story. He had already answered several questions for me starting in 2002 before I actually met him at the LCTHF office in Great Falls in 2004. I remember thinking immediately that he would be as friendly and helpful in person as he had been on the phone; and he always was. Don kindly shared with me Journal accounts about the time the Corps spent in the Great Falls area; and in ensuing years, and he took me to marvel at the portage site and other nearby historic places. Don often used the resources of the William P Sherman Library and Archives to ensure the information he provided was accurate. I once told him that he was a great reference librarian. Then he smiled and asked if that were a good thing; and I replied, it absolutely was. I could tell many stories about being with Don on various delightful occasions, but I tried to sum up my feelings about him in these few paragraphs. I will certainly miss him.

Lee Ebeling acknowledged Don to be the guide’s guide.
We went out with Don and a group from the PRC on this hike in the summer of 2009. Don led us up Alice Creek just east of Lincoln, MT, on the west side of the Continental Divide, to the top of Lewis and Clark Pass. When we got to the top Don read us Lewis’ journal entries for July 7, 1806. We had a discussion as Lewis now viewed the butte that he called “Fort Mountain.” This view told Lewis and the crew with him that they were now back in the land of plenty...plenty of game to feast upon after many hungry days west of the Divide. Buffalo, elk, and deer were plainly in sight. They knew it was pretty much downstream from here back to St Louis and they proceeded on down to the Great Falls. After our hike, which was attended by about 12, we had a genuine Lewis and Clark meal of buffalo stew, biscuits, and grog. A great time was had by all. It is a relatively easy hike up to this pass on the Continental Divide. Our Norman Anderson gave a very interesting talk on Lewis’ trip back from Travelers Rest. He also presented that talk at one of the PRC’s monthly meetings.

Phil Scrive wrote of his old friend’s passing.

I knew it was coming, but not as soon as it did. It is still hard to believe a friend of more than 40 years is gone. Don Peterson, friend, work associate, fellow Lewis and Clark advocate.

I was preparing to start my second year as President of the PRC in January of 1993. All the officer positions were covered except the Secretary. During one of my visits with Don Peterson—his office was just up the hall from mine—I asked him about the Secretary position. I knew he was interested in Lewis and Clark, but he had never joined the local or national organization, so I felt sure he would accept my offer to be Secretary, which he did. As the saying goes, the rest is history. Don proved to be a knowledgeable, capable, and involved member both locally and nationally. His participation ranged from the small local tours he joined as a member or as a leader to various projects and PRC events. He could be found everywhere doing what he was called upon to do. His friends from many parts of the nation mourn his passing.
Steve Lee said of Don:

I was President of the LCTHF in 2016. It gave me great comfort to know that Don was often the first person callers or visitors would encounter in the Great Falls headquarters. He could answer questions and direct messages to the correct places. I knew our office was in good hands with Don on our team.

Sue Buchel exclaimed, “We all have stories! I have my own.”

In 2011, I talked my partner John into publishing a small book of his poetry. We hit the “book signing” road that summer and came through Great Falls, setting up at Hastings one evening. Here, out of the blue, came Don. Not because he was a great poetry fan, not because he had nothing else to do that night, not because he was a buddy of John’s, but because he was MY friend. Period. His simple act of friendship will never be forgotten. That was Don.

Dick Brooks of Phillips, Maine, and like Don, a USAF veteran, remembers the good times he had with Don while mourning his loss.

December 26, 2020…. A very sad day for me, Don’s remarkable list of friends and acquaintances, the Lewis and Clark people, and humanity. Philippa asked me to jot down some memories I have. Two problems: one, at 86 plus my memory is a vast wasteland and two, the inventory of visits, experiences, and Montana in general, is voluminous.

Don always took us someplace remote or otherwise interesting. My wife, Agnes, the Michael twins, and my granddaughter Michele, all ganged up on Don when we visited Great Falls and partook of his encyclopedic knowledge of everything out there…starting with the Falls, the Lewis and Clark statues, and Fort Benton. He took us to the overlook of the junction of the Marias River and with the Missouri. We visited the "take out" camp below the Falls and the camp above GF and the Falls. He took us to places that are not known to the tour guides, like the ancient course of the Missouri, the campsite of Lewis and Clark further upriver from the better-known encampment. That site was used by a crew from the Corps who harvested logs there and took them...
down to where they would be used. Don showed us where the iron boat frame might be buried (but still is lost to us).

I could go on and on about Don in his role as a guide (free of charge!!) and his role as a wonderful friend and human being.

One comical event comes to mind. When my granddaughter was with us we went to the Giant Springs. It was summer in Montana—hot that August and Don’s old Chevy had no air conditioning. When we returned to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, we took a break before "proceeding on." Michele asked me if Don had a car with air conditioning!! We all got a huge kick out of that request. Don must have taken it to heart, though, because a couple years later, he got a new car WITH a/c!! Just like Down Town. Don, if you can read any of this, may God rest your immortal soul. To me you were the Greatest and I know your sweet wife, Cherie, holds the same loving perspective as do so many, near and far.