



## The Road Goes Ever On



*Photo copyright Virgin Gallatic*

*As we cruise down the road of life, sometimes we stop for a spell before heading on to someplace new. As 2011 drew to a close, the staff here at White Sands National Monument prepared to bid farewell to a long-time friend and co-worker, Kenneth—or Kenny—Owen, who retired on December 31, 2011.*

Kenny was the park's longest tenured employee, dedicating his entire career to White Sands. Before he left, I had a chance to sit down with him and chat about the things he's seen and done over the last nearly four decades. Kenny began working at White Sands in 1974. When asked how he got started, the native New Mexican chuckled and said, "Well, I needed a job! I was fresh out of high school so I went down to the unemployment office in Alamogordo. They had me take some kind of a test that told them what jobs I was qualified for." Shortly after accepting another job, he was offered a position at the entrance station, which he initially turned down. Two weeks later, Kenny found himself laid off and went back to accept the job. "They still wanted me, so I took the position," he smiled.

Kenny worked in the entrance station until February of 1987 when he switched over to the Maintenance Division. He remained there for the rest of his career. That's not to say that he didn't help out elsewhere. For example, during his first 12 years, Kenny was not a full-time employee. "I wanted to work! So I also worked two or three days a week for the Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, now called the Western National

Park Association. You know, working behind the visitor center desk and all whenever they needed me." Of course, that's not all—throughout the years, Kenny has helped out law enforcement rangers and did work in interpretation and resource management, too. "Oh, I've done just about everything there is to do in this park over the years," he grinned.

Kenny recounted an experience he had helping one of the law enforcement rangers make an arrest that almost resulted in a flipped vehicle. "It was spring break and there were a lot of college and high school students here from all over." At the time, alcohol was still allowed in the park during the months of February through May. Many of the visiting students had been drinking and were getting a little rowdy. The law enforcement ranger on duty eventually decided to handcuff one of the kids with Kenny's help and brought him up to the office for questioning. The rest of the teens decided that they were going to tip over a van in protest. When they couldn't get the van all the way over, they decided to slit all the tires. "That was one of the more exciting things that happened while I was working here," Kenny said.

In the end, Kenny's departure is bittersweet. "I'm going to miss the people I work with. But then again, although I've enjoyed my time here at White Sands, I've had a good long run. I've seen several superintendents come and go, three remodelings of the visitor center... I've got my memories, you know, and I'm going to enjoy retirement, too," he told me. And of course, he doesn't plan on just gathering dust at home. "I've got a part-time job that I'll be working at, so I plan to keep moving." As J.R.R. Tolkien once wrote, "The road goes ever on and on out from the door where it began." All of us at White Sands wish Kenny the best of luck wherever that road may lead him now.

—Tara Cuvelier, VIS



*Kenny with his "golden" garbage picker*