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FEATURED

# Lifelong Pathfinder overcomes adversity to attend first Camporee

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Vernon Norman and his wife Margaret Norman at Primrose Retirement Community on Friday in Gillette. Vernon, who has been a Pathfinder since he was 9, was granted a Wish of a Lifetime by AARP to come to his first ever International Pathfinder Camporee. Norman suffered a stroke that has left him paralyzed on the right side of his body and with expressive aphasia.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Vernon Norman sat in the passenger seat looking out toward the stream of children forming a line alongside the road.

The Pathfinder club from Southern California stood at attention, listening to the direction of their director, whose leadership role Vernon once held.

Despite first joining Pathfinders — a Seventh-day Adventist scout-like club — at age 9, more than 60 years ago, Vernon had once given up hope of ever making it to an International Pathfinder Camporee.

That all changed last week.

There he was, partially paralyzed from a stroke yet having traveled all the way from Huntsville, Alabama, to Gillette, in the heart of thousands of Pathfinders and campers whom he's always considered himself a part of.

With the Pathfinders in formation, their leader, Robert Harris, directed the Kansas Ave. Pathfinder Club from Riverside, California, to salute the man who founded their club.

“He told them, “This is the man who started me in Pathfinders,” said Margaret, Vernon’s wife.

Together they raised their hands to their foreheads and followed their command.

It was a simple gesture, and one that carried a lifetime of meaning for the man who spent the majority of his life in the organization he hasn't been able to take part in for years.

Reliving the moment brings a flood of emotion to his face, a show of sincerity that speaks louder than words he could find himself. To see his eyes, conveying the clear meaning that moment and his time at Camporee held, puts a lump in your throat.

He paused before he softly spoke.

"It was — touching," he said.

That moment, Vernon said, made his whole trip worthwhile, a trip that he never thought possible.

"It was very rewarding," Margaret said. "That was the highlight of the week for him, to see that club at Camporee."









Vernon Norman smiles at Primrose Retirement Community on Friday in Gillette. Vernon, who has been a Pathfinder since he was 9, was granted a Wish of a Lifetime by AARP to come to his first ever International Pathfinder Camporee. Norman suffered a stroke that has left him paralyzed on the right side of his body and with expressive aphasia.

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That news made possible the moment Vernon shared with the Pathfinder club he founded, and all the moments in between. Despite the event canceling its nightly performance for Saturday, and many heading home early due to weather concerns that never materialized, Vernon enjoyed every part of the trip he always imagined, but never thought possible.

“I’ve been to the mountain top and heaven now with the experience,” he said.

It would have been easier to give up than maintain hope while aging through his recent years of health issues. But his perseverance was rewarded.

Through it all, he took to heart the lessons of being thankful for what you have, rather than lamenting what you lack, and the significance of helping others — and accepting help — a sentiment laden through the Pathfinder ethos.

We all need something to live for. For Vernon, there's now the next Camporee in 2029.

“I would come back to Gillette, God willing,” he said.

#### Wish of a Lifetime

To learn more about the program that brought Vernon Norman to his first International Pathfinder Camporee, visit [wishofalifetime.org](https://www.wishofalifetime.org).

Jake Goodrick