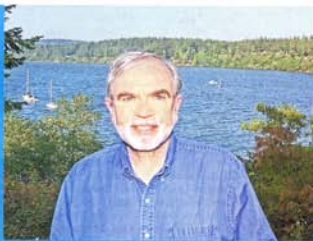


The
character
and
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Freelance writer Dan Pedersen recently released his first full-length, self-published book, "Whidbey Island's Special Places And the People Who Love Them."

Photo courtesy of Dan Pedersen

WHIDBEY ISLAND



Dunlin congregate at Crockett Lake on a quiet November Day.

Photo courtesy of Craig Johnson

Whidbey Island's Special Places
And the People Who Love Them

By Dan Pedersen

By Dan Pedersen

By BEVERLY CRICHFIELD / Features Editor

LANGLEY — Defining Whidbey Island is tough. Say the name and most people undoubtedly think of Whidbey Island Naval Air Station and Deception Pass State Park.

But for Dan Pedersen, Whidbey is an alluring blend of abundant wildlife, breathtaking scenery, history and a tight-knit community of people who have dedicated their lives to keeping its natural character intact.

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► For more information or to receive a copy of Dan Pedersen's book, "Whidbey Island's Special Places And the People Who Love Them," visit his Web site at www.whidbeywriter.com.

Whidbey

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So when it came time to put together his first full-length book about the island he's called home since 1986, there were no lists of campsites, no scientific descriptions of wild birds or foliage.

Instead, Pedersen's self-published "Whidbey Island's Special Places And the People Who Love Them" is the story of the island, told from the perspectives of 10 people who live there and work to conserve its habitat.

The 64-page book is chock-full of fascinating facts and 95 color images showing the most popular wildlife, including orca whales, bald eagles and the Least Sandpiper, and the fields of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, Crockett Lake and South Whidbey State Park.

Each chapter highlights remarkable locations on the island with comments from the people who know them best — state Parks Ranger Rick Blank, who gives readers a tour of Deception Pass State Park; Roger Sherman, cemetery district commissioner and local historian who provides intimate glimpses of Whidbey's pioneers buried in the historic Sunnyside Cemetery overlooking Ebey's Landing; Pat Powell, who has worked with the Whidbey Camano Land Trust to help set aside acres of land for preservation; and photographer, pilot and diver Veronica von Allworden, who has through the years photographed some of Whidbey's brilliant marine life.

Pedersen's book mines the depths of the local characters in all their eccentric, passionate and dedicated glory to shine the light on a community that's become the backbone of Whidbey's natural landscape.

It's a book that's close to Pedersen's heart, he said.

"I really wanted this book to have some real value," the 62-year-old freelance writer and Island County Marine Resources Committee communications manager said. "I wanted to write a book that fits with my personal mission, an effort to be educational (about the environment) without being threatening."

The idea of a book had been rattling around in Pedersen's head since 2006 when he finished co-writing "Getting to the Water's Edge: A Field Guide to Island County Beaches," a collaborative project between Washington State University Extension Beachwatchers and the Island County Marine Resources Committee.

While he was proud of the way the book turned out, with its colorful photos and descriptions of Whidbey's beach habitat and efforts to preserve the shoreline, it reads more like a guidebook, Pedersen said.

What it lacked was the character of the area and the people who each day dramatically affect the natural landscape, he said.

Then Pedersen began hearing from



Photo courtesy of Dan Pedersen

The Davis Blockhouse, on the grounds of today's Sunnyside Cemetery, was built in 1857 to help defend the donation land claim of James Davis. He was one of three brothers of Rebecca Davis Ebey, a Whidbey Island pioneer.

small bookstores in the area that they didn't have any books written about the island, other than historical publications.

Pedersen had plenty of contacts with people he'd met through the years while writing for the county's Marine Resources Committee and Whidbey Camano Land Trust publications to begin filling out a book.

And, of course, he was familiar with the territory, having grown up on Camano Island, attending school in Mount Vernon and graduating from the University of Washington in Seattle.

He landed a job right out of high school working for the Skagit Valley Herald, and learned the ins and outs of reporting and writing.

After graduating from UW with a master's degree in communication, Pedersen spent time in the Air Force, and then worked at various outdoor magazines and newspapers until he landed a job in corporate communications at Safeco Corporation.

He retired from Safeco in 2002 after 22 years, and then found himself with more time to concentrate on supporting local environmental organizations.

Despite his passion for Whidbey's natural landscape and wildlife and his involvement with local preservation groups, Pedersen says he's not a particularly "outdoorsy" type.

"It's probably because we live in the woods, and there isn't a day that goes by I don't walk outside and comment about what the birds are doing or what is happening in our woods," Pedersen said. "We're surrounded by the outdoors. We live among all kinds of fascinating creatures."

Shortly after Pedersen finished "Getting to the Water's Edge," friend and graphic artist Craig Johnson of Freeland urged Pedersen to pursue his dreams of putting together his own book on Whidbey.

Johnson and Pedersen have known each other for years, often traveling in the same circles. Both have been involved with the Whidbey Audubon Society and are writers.

Johnson, a graphic artist, photographer and author of several books on birds, said he and Pedersen discussed how Pedersen wanted his book to look. And Johnson was thrilled when Peder-

sen explained his idea for interviewing local Whidbey residents in their own voices.

"I definitely encouraged him," Johnson said. "I thought that (his idea) was quite unique and would make the book stand out."

The two quickly came up with what's called a "landscape" format for the book and Pedersen made up his mind to go for it.

"I knew the subject matter and the interesting people to talk to — I had access to a graphics designer," Pedersen said, with a laugh, noting he also had significant experience with printing from his days working at Safeco. "So last spring, I decided to do it."

And he did, devoting all his waking hours to mapping out the locations he wanted to spotlight, deciding who to talk with, setting up interviews, researching and dragging his camera out on those few sunny days to capture Whidbey in its best and brightest light. He concentrated on locations with public access and special significance.

Pedersen was careful to record each interview for authenticity.

"I love to write about people and I wanted each chapter in the voice that each person would speak in," he said.

No one turned him down for a requested interview, he said. Each subject was eager to share their perspectives on Whidbey, including Johnson, who was featured along with his wife, Joy, in a chapter on Crockett Lake and Keystone Spit.

Pedersen finished the book with help from Johnson in just months. And so far, it's received rave reviews, primarily from locals who recognize many of the 10 people interviewed in the book.

Pedersen said the book has been selling well in a few coffee shops that cater to tourists in Langley and local independent bookstores. Currently, it's for sale at Snow Goose Books in Stanwood, The Next Chapter Bookstore in La Conner, Watermark Book Co. in Anacortes, The Island Framery and Wild Birds Unlimited in Clinton, Whidbey Camano Land Trust and Greenbank Farm Wine Shop in Greenbank, and a list of locations in Coupeville. Pedersen said he didn't know what the reaction to his book would be, but is pleased with what he's heard.

He estimates that he should be able to sell 5,000 copies of the book in about two years.

Johnson said the book's success comes from its format — highlighting local residents and using colorful and striking photographs — and the bevy of information that's included in an interesting style.

"I'm a native of Puget Sound and had family living on Whidbey for a long time, but there's things in there I didn't know, and probably people who live there don't know, either," Johnson said. "There's a lot of information for different folks; not just one segment of people."

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