

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



Edward Higgins appreciates alligators. He says, "Everybody's afraid of them, but they don't bother you if you don't bother them."

PADDLING IN PARADISE

BY DIANE DANIEL | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

When Edward and Deborah Higgins retired to Punta Gorda, Fla., from their home in Lynn, New Englanders asked if they were worried about hurricanes, especially since Hurricane Charley had wiped out a good portion of their new city in 2004. Deb's response: "You *will* get snow up north. We *may* get a hurricane." The odds have stuck with them.

Ed, 71, grew up in Peabody and spent 32 years as a firefighter in Lynn, retiring in 2008 as department chief. He loved being on the water and often fished from a canoe. Deb, 62 and a Lynn native, worked at various accounting and record-keeping jobs with the Lynn Fire Department. Neither had kayaked until they moved to Florida in 2009, but once they tried it, they were smitten and soon started exploring new paddling routes. After dispensing advice to fellow members of the Punta Gorda Boat Club for years, they took the plunge and wrote and published two guidebooks to kayaking in and around Southwest Florida: "Paddles in Paradise" (2013) and "More Paddles in Paradise" (2015). Below are edited excerpts from an interview with the couple.

Q. Why Punta Gorda?

Ed: The fire chief I replaced, Curtis Numberg, had a house there and we used to visit him and liked the little town. We were done with cold and snow, but for many years I said I never wanted to live in Florida. But that was before we saw the West Coast. It's less commercial and

has a slower pace than the East Coast.

Q. Why do you prefer kayaking over canoeing?

Ed: I feel more connected to the water. We bought a motorboat in 2009, but every time we had time on our hands we'd say, "Let's go kayaking." We sold it in 2015.

Deb: I like going in my kayak, and he can go in his.

Q. What compelled you to write paddling guides?

Deb: We wanted to discover new places, so I started researching. I couldn't find the resources I wanted, so I compiled all this information for leading trips. Then people started calling us asking, "Where was that place we paddled a year ago?," things like that. Someone said we should write a book and we joked about it, but that planted the seed.

Ed: The research for each book took a good year. For every one of the 25 trips in each book, there were three others that didn't make it. I did the writing and Deb took all the photos.

Q. Overall, what types of trips do you detail?

Ed: We tried to find the prettiest paddles, places you could never see unless you were in a kayak or canoe. We love little creeks and rivers and canals, where motorboats don't go, and the book sticks with recreational paddles that aren't too difficult.

Q. What's one special trip?

Ed: There are so many, but one is best done in the

dark. On Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in the summer you can paddle among bioluminescent plankton, which leave a blue glow with any movement, whether it's your paddle or a dolphin. We were thrilled.

Q. What surprised you the most about paddling in Florida?

Ed: We never realized how much wildlife there was, especially the birds, like roseate spoonbills and hawks. Manatees have come right up to us. Plus I love alligators. Everybody's afraid of them, but they don't bother you if you don't bother them.

Deb: I did have one jump over my head.

Q. How did that happen?

Deb: We were at the Myakka River State Park, going to Deep Hole, which has a lot of gators. On the way back, I came around a bend with a little sand bank, where I'd seen a gator earlier, so I was trying not to startle him. But he'd gone to the opposite bank and was actually now higher than my head. He startled me, and I startled him. He jumped over my head to get into the water, making this huge splash. The tip of his tail hit my kayak.

Ed: As soon as I saw the splash, I thought I might have to go over and wrestle with a gator.

More information on the couple and their books, which sell for \$15 each or both for \$25, can be found at www.paddlesinparadise.com. Diane Daniel can be reached at diane@bydianedaniel.com.

HERE

SWEET SCHOOL BREAK ACTIVITIES

Parents looking for local adventures over the upcoming school break should check out the February vacation schedule at Billings Farm & Museum in Woodstock, a fully-operational dairy farm and a museum of Vermont's rural heritage. (Feb. 15-March 1) "Maple Celebration at the Farm" will celebrate the state's maple sugaring process with events that include tastings and cooking demonstrations such as enjoying "sugar on snow," a traditional treat, as well as sampling and collecting recipes for maple popcorn, maple shortbread, and more. (With an added bonus of tasting the farm's own cheeses and yogurt.) Additional activities include horse-drawn sleigh rides on select dates, weather permitting; a new exhibit about ice cutting in Vermont; and, for younger children, a story time featuring books about maple and sugaring. In the dairy farm, kids can meet Jersey cows, draft horses, oxen, chickens, and sheep. Adults/seniors \$16/\$14; ages 3-16 \$4-\$9. 802-457-2355, billingsfarm.org

ICY RINK FOR MORE THAN SKATING

What's more fun than bumper cars? How about bumper cars on ice? The whole family can enjoy wintery fun in Rhode Island at The Providence Rink, the first outdoor rink offering ice bumper cars on its skating rink. De-



pending on the day of week and time, participants can glide with a 360-degree turn radius over one-third or the entire rink, smacking into opponents sliding forward, backward and sideways. Sessions last 15 minutes and are scheduled every 20 minutes. Reservations are recommended. Open daily through mid-March. Check online schedule for dates and times. Rates from \$12. 401-680-7390, theprovidencerink.com/bumper-cars



THERE

NEW HOTEL SHINES IN HERALD SQUARE

Those looking for an historic-meets-contemporary New York hotel experience may want to check out the recently-opened Kixby. Housed in a historic Beaux-Arts building in Midtown Manhattan's Herald Square, the 195-room hotel is steps away from terrific shopping opportunities — including Macy's flagship store — Bryant Park, Madison Square Garden, Broadway theaters and the Empire State Building. (Indeed, the Lookup Rooftop Bar encourages guests to "look up" at stunning views of the 102-story icon of New York landmark.) Spacious rooms, outfitted in a stylish periwinkle blue and charcoal-gray palette, feature 10-foot

ceilings, clean-lined solid oak furniture, dressers with hidden safe and minifridge, and Matouk linens. Marble bathrooms feature rain shower heads, lighted mirrors, amenities by MALIN + GOETZ, and Frette luxury bathrobes. Rates from \$295. 212-947-2500, www.kixby.com

ROMANTIC VISIONS IN NASHVILLE

Fans of the luminous watercolors, oil paintings and sketches of British artist Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) won't be disappointed by *J.M.W. Turner: Quest for the Sublime*, the sole US exhibition of these works at the Frist Museum, Nashville. (Feb. 20-May 31) Organized in cooperation with UK's Tate, the approximately 75 works highlight the painter's career from the 1790s to the late 1840s. A central figure in the Romantic movement, the artist is known and celebrated for images ranging from mountain landscapes and stormy seascapes to epic history paintings and mysterious scenes of Venice. 615-244-3340, fristmuseum.org/calendar/detail/j.m.w.turner-quest-for-the-sublime

EVERYWHERE

PACK SMART AND TRAVEL BETTER

Organize your travel gear and equipment with Subtech's new Smart Pack System. The fully adjustable compartments keep your stuff separated and protected, meaning you can find what you need when you need it without unpacking the entire contents of your bag. The lightweight system is designed for adventurous travelers who want to bring their cameras or other



sensitive gear into extreme environments. Fits into Subtech's own waterproof Pro Drybags or any other bag or suitcase. Available in three sizes. \$49-\$99. www.subtechsports.com/product/smart-pack-system-large

SLEEP KIT FOR WEARY TRAVELERS

Travel often disrupts sleep routines, leaving business and leisure travelers tired and less able to function at work or play. Saje Natural Wellness has created Sleep Routine, a restful collection of products to help you snooze on long flights or in your hotel. The TSA-friendly kit includes a roll-on sleep oil blend to rub on pulse points, under jawline, or soles of feet; relaxing Tranquility face and body mist to spritz on face or pillow; and velvety-soft lightweight eyeshade. Available with a limited-edition travel bag for your carry-on and nightstand. \$30. www.saje.com/product/sleep-routine-704378.html

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