



A ‘rest’ becomes a life’s work

Mexican government thanks Laurel Patrick for creating. . .



Photo by Carol Brocker
<http://tinyurl.com/aydpff4>

LAUREL PATRICK shows a Mexican tree porcupine during an animal encounter program at El Refugio de Potosí.

By **TRISHA WALKER**
News staff writer

When former Hood River resident Laurel Patrick began traveling regularly to Mexico in the early 1980s, she wasn't thinking about its unique biodiversity or how she could bring attention to the many species that filled the region. But then she created El Refugio de Potosí — and that is exactly what she has done.

For her dedicated work, Patrick was awarded a Recognition of Conservation Award from the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (in Spanish, CONANP) on Oct. 31. The event was held in Lagunas de Zempoala National Park, one of the first established National Parks in Mexico, about two hours outside of Mexico City.

A panel of seven judges, including environmentalist Dr. Jose Sarukhan Kermes, selected winners in five categories. Four awards were presented to businesses, nonprofits and education programs, while Patrick won an individual award as Conservationist of the Year along with a 75,000-peso cash prize.

In the five years Patrick has made Mexico her permanent home, she has developed El Refugio de Potosí into an animal refuge and research center with a small staff of three to seven. Initially, however, her plan was to simply enjoy “a long winter rest.”

Patrick, who owned Hood River Ornamentals Inc. along the Dee Highway until 2007, spent about three months each winter in Zihuatanejo, along with the more rustic locale of Playa Blanca

about 15 miles away, eventually building a small house on the beach near the village of Barra de Potosí.

“I started to see, for the first time, an array of plants and animals I had previously missed: wild orchids, bromeliads, flowering plants, bizarre insects, a parade range of birds, and exotic animals previously unknown to me,” said Patrick. “I was dumbfounded; after years of visiting the place, I had missed the best parts.”

Patrick found that many others seemed to be unaware the creatures were there, or that there was a lot of misinformation.

“When I spoke to the locals, there was a lot of odd feedback, myths that even I recognized, horror stories that defied any reality, and a lot of gaps in the middle,” she said. She eventually decided to make Mexico her home and help bring attention to the region's rich biodiversity.

And in 2009, El Refugio de Potosí was born.

With help and inspiration from local biologist Pablo Mendizabal, Patrick developed a plan to create a nonprofit center to increase awareness of the flora and fauna in the tropical dry forest of Playa Blanca, Zihuatanejo, Guerrero.

But the name “El Refugio de Potosí” sent out an unintentional message to both local residents and the Mexican government, and the refuge soon become a safe haven for wild animals.

“There is no other place in the State of Guerrero to receive wild animals in need of sanctuary. This was not my in-

tended mission. But once people started bringing me animals in need, I could hardly refuse,” said Patrick. “How can we ask people to care when there are no support facilities?”

With a volunteer veterinarian, the center receives animals that have been injured or orphaned. “We have received everything from coatimundi, jaguarundi, tree porcupines, macaws, parrots of all order, raptors and everything in between from poisonous reptiles to sea turtles to song birds,” said Patrick.

The staff consists of locals who, in the beginning, had no interest in the center's mission — they were simply looking to survive. They have since developed what Patrick calls a “passion for the world.”

“They came without knowledge or general interest and now I am surrounded by people who care,” said Patrick. “These people make the difference.”

Patrick was nominated for the Conservationist of the Year by a biologist on staff.

“In reality, I am not the person who has done the most,” said Patrick. “I am the person whose story sounds the best. It is a huge surprise and bow from the Mexican government to award this prize to a foreigner.”

“I am deeply honored. I believe it will help El Refugio de Potosí accomplish parts of our mission that have been a significant struggle.”

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For more information, visit elrefugiodepotosi.org.



AN AFRICAN SCORPION and a Mexican red-kneed tarantula provide a lesson in courage during her presentation.



PATRICK receives many orphaned animals at the refuge including this baby brown booby.

Remembering Javier Campos

Former Hood River resident Javier Campos came to work with Patrick after relocating to Mexico to be with family.

Years earlier, during one of her winter breaks, Patrick brought a coffee

table-style book about Hood River to share with residents, and when Campos came, they remembered the Hood River connection. “He came to me as a kid, recently transplanted, without much experi-

ence in the world and even less in his new home in Mexico,” said Patrick. Campos developed a passion for the center and its mission, inspiring visitors with the tours he gave, individually tailored to the

interests of the group.

Unfortunately, this part of the story does not have a happy ending: Campos was killed in an automobile accident in June at the age of 23. Patrick hopes others will carry on Campos' work.



Photo by Kathy Ursprung

DRAMATIC dance moves performed by Gavin McAlpine of Hood River entranced the crowd at the recent Dancing with the Gorge Stars competition held in The Dalles. McAlpine, shown here with dancer Casey Bartlemay of the Utah Ballroom Dance Company, took on the Paso Doble.

Dancer dares to do the Paso Doble

By **JULIE RAEFIELD-GOBBO**
News staff writer

Paso Doble: Just saying the name of this Latin dance elicits romantic images of strong men, beautiful women, measured movements and passionate guitar strums.

For a large crowd of dance enthusiasts in the Gorge, a recent fundraiser-competition called Dancing with the Gorge Stars provided the opportunity to witness the Paso Doble performed live, featuring Hood River native Gavin McAlpine.

“It was kind of one of those once-in-a-lifetime shots to do something that I was really curious about,” said McAlpine, a realtor with John L. Scott Realty. “It took me about a millisecond to say yes to doing it.”

While McAlpine is not a stranger to the stage — performing annually in the Columbia Gorge Dance Academy's Nutcracker performances — this was his first foray into a true dance competition.

“I have no dance training whatsoever,” admitted McAlpine, who, though the only entrant from outside Wasco County, garnered significant cheers and hoots of support in The Dalles-Wahtonka High School auditorium, in front of three judges, all The

Dalles residents.

McAlpine noted that although he wasn't the top vote getter, he was extremely satisfied with his performance.

“The Wasco County Sheriff won it and that would be a hard person to beat in The Dalles!”

The event was presented by the Corvallis-based Utah Ballroom Dance Company. The dance troupe also performed in Hood River the same weekend. The troupe was on a 47-city tour across the West producing fundraisers for a variety of nonprofit organizations in combination with its regular dance shows.

The Utah Ballroom Dance Company stages the Dancing with the Stars events by teaching local volunteers specific ballroom dances and then partnering them with their semi-professional dancers for the “competitions.”

The Dalles' event featured five volunteers from The Dalles community and McAlpine. Each volunteer worked with a Utah Ballroom dance partner for more than 15 hours of practice prior to the event.

McAlpine, to his credit, was the first local participant to ever seek out the challenging Paso Doble routine.

“They told me I was the first Paso

Doble volunteer in the history of their presenting their ‘Dancing With’ events,” said McAlpine. “The Paso Doble has very crisp movements. It has an aggressive nature. It was the one I wanted to do.”

McAlpine was partnered with Casey Bartlemay, a longtime member of the troupe whose athletic build, flexibility and dramatic moves resembled that of a professional gymnast.

“She was absolutely fantastic as a dancer and teacher. I couldn't have asked for a better partner,” said McAlpine. The pair were dressed in red and black, providing the additional visual drama needed for their chosen style of dance.

While McAlpine was “the lone foreigner” in the competition, he was encouraged by the great show of support from other Hood River residents.

“I was amazed at how many people showed up from Hood River and I was equally shocked at how many people from The Dalles voted for me,” he said. “There was a lot of support all the way around.”

Thinking about next year, McAlpine admits that he would jump — or perhaps jeté — at the chance to do it all again.