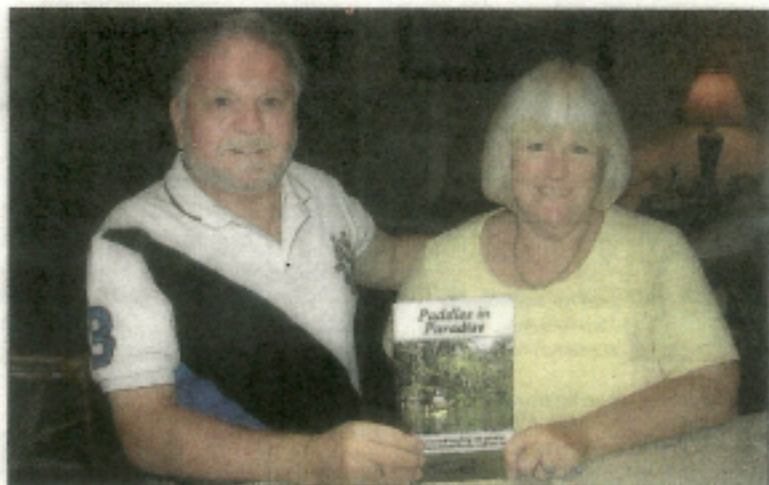


PGH  
COMMUNITY  
BEAT IN PUNTA GORDA



Local authors  
publish book  
about favorite  
their local  
kayaking spots

HERALD PHOTO BY AL HEMINGWAY

Authors Ed and Deb Higgins pose for a photo with their new book, "Paddles in Paradise," which deals with their kayaking experiences.

# Paddling in Paradise

To Deb and Ed Higgins, kayaking is much more than a leisurely jaunt on a Sunday afternoon. To them it's almost like a religion. By paddling on a stream or creek, they can leave civilization behind and venture out to experience life the way nature intended it be.

That's when the two had a brainstorm — why not write a book and pass along the knowledge that they had learned to make it easier for local paddlers to enjoy kayaking.

The finished product hit selected newsstands on June 1. Titled "Paddles in Paradise: A guide to casual kayaking and canoeing around Punta Gorda Florida ... and beyond," it covers 25 different locations where kayakers can go and see firsthand what the Higgins' call "paradise."

Because the book is increasing in popularity, they are planning to do a sequel adding even more sites.

Originally from Lynn, Mass., the Higgins' moved to Punta Gorda almost 6 years ago. Ed retired as chief of the Lynn Fire Department and Deb worked for the city in the comptroller's office and the fire department as well.

"We were looking to move south when we retired to get away from the snow and cold," Ed Higgins said. "We had a 2-year plan, and we were looking at places in Arizona and New Mexico. Then I visited a friend who had retired to Punta Gorda and said to Deb, 'why not here?'"

An ardent fisherman and pilot, Ed also did some canoeing but had never been in a kayak until he relocated to the Sunshine State. After joining the Punta Gorda Boat Club, the couple was introduced to the sport by Ron and Jan Norvelle.

After a few excursions, they were hooked.

"Instead of renting, we purchased two good 14-foot kayaks and joined the Port Charlotte Kayak Club to familiarize ourselves to the area," Ed Higgins said.



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"It's very informal. They would select a site on Wednesday and go paddling on Sunday."

That, however, was not enough for them. The pair wanted to expand their adventures and seek out other areas where they could kayak and explore.

"I spend hours on the computer looking for kayaking blogs to find new places to go," Deb Higgins said.

Although they discovered some gems, they noticed that the websites were lacking pertinent information such as launch sites, parking, restrooms, picnic areas and the difficulty of paddling the creek, stream or river. That's when the concept of a book became a reality.

"My favorite kayaking spot is Fisheating Creek in Glades County," Ed Higgins said. "It's at the end of Belmont Road in Palmdale, about an hour from Punta Gorda. It is a black water cypress swamp, which I refer to as my spiritual place."

"As I have said many times about many a river we were on, this is where I go to church," Ed Higgins continued. "Well, Fisheating Creek is our St. Peter's Basilica."

Ed Higgins said that he and his wife are partial to remote areas that have remained in pristine condition and are teeming with wildlife. Silver River in Marion County is another example, he said, of that unique feeling of "being one with nature."

According to Deb Higgins, wild rhesus monkeys have inhabited the area since the 1930s when a local entrepreneur named Col. Tooney, a glass bottom boat operator, brought them in to an island for sightseers to view.



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Ed Higgins maneuvers his kayak along Fisheating Creek in Palmdale. BELOW LEFT: A barred owl peers out from its perch atop a tree on Telegraph Creek, a tributary of the Caloosahatchee River. BELOW: RIGHT: A rhesus monkey looks down upon the paddlers on the Silver River.



"He didn't realize that they could swim," she said. "So, they swam off the island and are now all over the place. They jump from tree-to-tree and are quite a sight."

Ed Higgins has seen the sport grow considerably since they took up permanent residence in Florida.

"I'm not sure if it's the economy or the price of gas that boaters pay," he said. "But we used to have about 14 on an outing, now we have 35 or more."

The book not only focuses on the various locations kayakers can travel to but it also delves into the cost of purchasing a kayak and paddle. Once a year, the couple will give lessons and



teach novice kayakers how to enjoy the sport that has brought them so much serenity.

"When we are out in these places, the outside world disappears," Ed Higgins writes in the book's introduction. "Time slows down. The sounds, the smells, the silence and the beauty are breathtaking. We are kids again. Everything is new and exciting. We are no longer jaded by all of our life and work experiences. We are seeing everything with new eyes, with new wonder."

For more information, visit the Higgins' website at [www.paddlesinparadise.com](http://www.paddlesinparadise.com) or send an e-mail to [paddlesinparadise@gmail.com](mailto:paddlesinparadise@gmail.com).