

COASTAL LIFE

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Authors invite readers to plunge in Astoria businessman publishes history of NW diving

By **PATRICK WEBB**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Longtime diver Floyd Holcom wants to recruit more to his sport — and signal that adventures await close to home in Oregon.

The Astoria businessman and his writing collaborator, Tom Hemphill, have just published “Diving Off The Oregon Coast,” a 96-page illustrated book chronicling the history of Northwest diving.

They hope its publication will encourage more people to strap on breathing apparatus and explore the world’s oceans.

Holcom and Hemphill of Vancouver, Washington, have accumulated multiple decades of diving experience. Both have helped hundreds of divers learn about safety, equipment and techniques for underwater adventures.

Proceeds from their book will benefit the Northwest Diving History Association.

The paperback is packed with photos dating back to the 1950s when the sport was in its infancy. These highlight fishing for abalone, lingcod and crab, and mention diving sites like Haystack Rock at Pacific City, Tillamook Head, the Barview jetty and Port Orford.

Breathing equipment, masks and cameras have their chapter. The authors describe how dive clubs



PHOTO COURTESY FLOYD HOLCOM
With the proper photographic equipment and some patience, divers can capture images of exotic wild critters in the ocean.

have helped promote their sport and look back at how diving has progressed since the creation of the National Association of Underwater Instructors in 1960. They mention today’s educational role of the Oregon Coast Aquarium at Newport and credit Northwest divers’ shared efforts to remove man-made debris from the undersea environment.

The project took a year as they condensed their selections from more than 800 photographs while polishing the captions and text.

The book features 25 pages of photos of colorful aquatic wildlife, including sea sponges, starfish, anemones and rock fish. It is those images and memories that Hemphill considers the most thrilling.

He first dived as a teenager in the late 1950s. An enjoyment of recreational diving spurred a career as a commercial diver, at shipyards and elsewhere, inspecting and photographing



PHOTO COURTESY FLOYD HOLCOM

Floyd Holcom, an Astoria businessman and former Special Forces soldier, has explored underwater locations around the world. He and fellow diver Tom Hemphill have published a book about the history of diving off the Oregon Coast.

underwater pipelines and performing heavy welding. He qualified as a Scuba instructor in the 1970s and has written a manual for commercial divers, as well as business and sales publications.

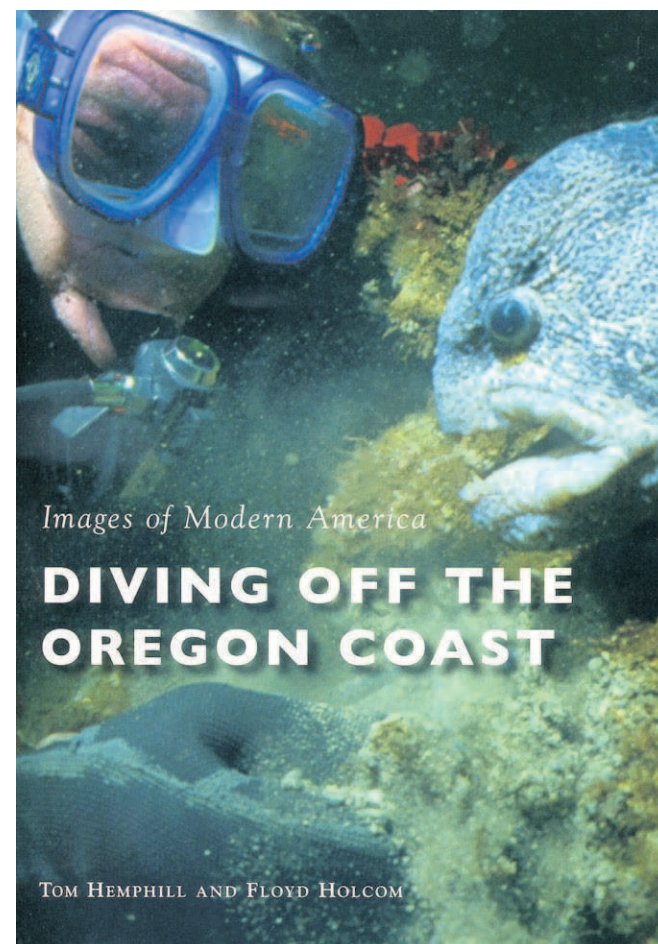
Now 72, his recent focus has been on land, lecturing and consulting. He delights in summing up the joy of diving. “Just being in the underwater world is a real pleasant environment,” Hemphill said. “For me, it’s a real comfortable environment. Just like some people enjoy climbing mountains — I don’t want to do that. Or jumping out of airplanes — I don’t want to do that, either!”

“The most enjoyable is the interactions with

marine life. I have had encounters with octopus and large fish. You can hand-feed them. I petted an octopus, and it petted me back. It’s like going out into the woods and having a positive interaction with deer, or elk or a squirrel. That’s what it’s like — except it’s underwater.”

Holcom has dived all over the world recreationally and during his travels with the U.S. Army, where he served in Special Forces. Twelve years ago, he opened Astoria Scuba at Pier 39 to equip and train people wanting to dive. The book reflects his similar enthusiasm.

“We really wanted to capture the imagination of the younger folks to get



TOM HEMPHILL AND FLOYD HOLCOM

SUBMITTED PHOTO

“Diving Off the Oregon Coast” by Tom Hemphill and Floyd Holcom.

them involved,” Holcom said.

The warm waters of Hawaii, Florida and the Caribbean are crowded diving locations, he said. The colder waters off Oregon, even popular locales like Newport and Garibaldi, are less congested and home to bigger species of aquatic critters like octopus.

Holcom hopes their book awakens an adventure mentality. “If you don’t explore the world’s oceans, you are missing out on 70 percent of the Earth,” he said.

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“Diving Off The Oregon Coast,” by Tom Hemphill and Floyd Holcom, 2016 Arcadia Publishing, Mount



PHOTO COURTESY FLOYD HOLCOM
Tom Hemphill

Pleasant, S.C., Images of Modern America series, Amazon, \$20.51. Proceeds benefit the Northwest Diving History Association. www.divinghistory.org

‘I PETTED AN OCTOPUS, AND IT PETTED ME BACK.’