



Linda Fenton-Mendenhall

North Coast photographer Linda Fenton-Mendenhall.

SCRATCHPAD

A hidden talent discovered in retirement

Photographer Linda Fenton-Mendenhall sells prints, calendars all over the world

By **ERICK BENDEL**
COAST WEEKEND

Amid the kaleidoscopic blur of colors, compliments, cheese, crackers, loose conversations and winey revelry of a recent Astoria Art Walk, my attention was

seized by a calendar for sale in the Pier 11 Building.

I didn't need a calendar, but I bought this one. Each month of 2019 displays a simple, textured image of the North Oregon Coast: Astoria's West Mooning basin for January, a lone paraglider at Clatsop Beach for May, a driftwood fort at Indian Beach for September and so on. A memento of my adopted home and a medium to literally mark my time at the coast.

The woman I bought it from, it turned out, was the photographer, Linda Fenton-Mendenhall. For 24 years, Linda worked at Fred Meyer in Warrenton, where she was the apparel manager. It was a solid, good-paying job with some creative outlets, but those were days spent in a big-box store with limited sunlight and a windowless office.

"The minute I got out of there, I was outside a lot," she said, "so I took advantage of it and just kind of became a tourist in my own county again."

Linda, who lives between Warrenton and Gearhart, isn't a lifelong photographer. She wasn't patiently waiting for the freedom of retirement to express her gift. In fact, she had no idea this gift was lurking in her. "It just wasn't really a thing for me," she said.

When out-of-town relatives would visit and do touristy things, she'd snap photos right along with them and thought, "Huh, this is kind of fun. Might keep doing this."

She now sells prints all over the world, and her calendars have shipped to other states and countries. "It just sort of took off," she said.



Linda Fenton-Mendenhall

A St. Patrick's Day Starfish at Hug Point, part of Linda Fenton-Mendenhall's ongoing series of holiday photos.

Linda's still on the learning curve, she said. She hasn't trained on Photoshop or taken photography classes. What she has is an eye. She discovered she knew intuitively what makes a compelling photo: detail, composition, a fresh angle. She frequently shoots at ground level, giving majesty to seagulls and sea stacks.


She keeps two shops in the county — Treasure Alley on Pier 11 and another at the Seaside Antique Mall, where she's part of an antique collective. She also sells on Etsy, has a permanent display at Fairweather House & Gallery in Seaside and is the photographer for the Seaside First Saturday Art Walk.

Her ongoing holidays series featuring starfish — a pair of starfish in love for Valentine's, a leprechaun-capped starfish for

St. Patrick's, etc. — makes the rounds on social media. A photo she posted before Christmas of a starfish in a Santa hat reached more than 350,000 Facebook users.

"It came out of the blue," she said. "I didn't expect to even be able to take pictures, let alone have it growing like it has."

The Fentons are a five-generation family in Clatsop County. Linda's father, Allen Fenton, runs the Memories of Warrenton Facebook page. He passed down his appreciation of the region to his daughter, though his projects emphasize the local history, hers the views and landscapes.

Linda's been getting a lot of requests to shoot weddings and portraits lately. "But I'd much rather do landscapes," she said, "and you don't have to get anyone's approval that way." 

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