

5 Minutes with... Tom Maertens

Maertens, 45, is the volunteer coordinator with the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, a position he will hold through October. He has a master's degree in geography from the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, and did doctoral work in geography at the University of British Columbia.



HEIDI LALIBERTE PHOTO

Q: Where are you originally from?

A: My family's from here (the Pacific Northwest). I split my winters in Detroit, Mich., and summers in Oregon with my dad and mom. And, at 17, I moved out here and started my university venture (at Pacific University, in Forest Grove), and then there's a list of 13 others that follow.

Q: (Tom refers to himself as a biogeographer.) Could you explain what biogeography is?

A: I study where things live and the processes that control them — where they live and why.

Q: How does that map onto marine biology?

A: Biogeography's an older thing. That's what Darwin was, for instance. (Alfred Russel) Wallace. A bunch of famous people we talk about — they were biogeographers. So you study natural processes and what controls the distribution of species. And you can use that in a petri dish of bacteria or in a forest...

It works in marine biology just the same ... Some things live in the deep tide pools, some on the more exposed areas. Puffins only go so far north, right? So you can look at any scale.

My early career was as a marine biologist. I worked with ghost crabs

in South Carolina originally, and then I did my senior thesis on ghost crabs. I was a "coastal biologist," I thought of myself as. I like the dunes, and I like the drift line, things like that. Plants on the shore.

Q: How did you hear about this gig?

A: Actually, I heard about it on the Texas A&M (University) Job Board. And then I mentioned it to people, and friends around town said I'd be great for the job. And that was that.

Q: I hear the city was slammed on Valentine's Day. (Samantha Ferber, Haystack Rock Awareness Program coordinator, said that she and her team counted 2,339 visitors during the program's first weekend of the year on the beach, Feb. 13 through 16.) Was that, at all, overwhelming?

A: It went by really fast! I got chapped lips. The joke is, it wasn't from the wind and the sun, it was just from talking for five hours straight.

Ninety-seven percent of the people are nice, in my little experience. About half of those are sincerely interested in learning more — like they're really interested in it, so that's really nice, to have a passionate group of people so easy to teach. It's not a chore.

And a few people just don't get it — just totally don't understand that

our anemones are decades old, maybe 100 years old. They want to poke them and pry them off. And people will wade into the tide pools — like, literally the whole family will walk in: "Where's a crab?"

It's like, "Wow. If you back up and let the sand settle, there's actually a dozen crabs in there."

I learned you actually have to just stop looking for things out there. You just stop — just stop what you're doing, and you will see things. So, my first day, I was running around looking for things to show people, and then I realized: Just stand there, and you can point at things right around. That wall that looks dead is actually a living wall of barnacles and mussels and chitons. Amazing!

Q: Where do you see yourself going after this position?

A: (Pause.) Thanks for thinking of me. (Smiles.)

I'm really in it for the journey, and I haven't gotten that far (in planning). The idea was to — for this (volunteer coordinator) project — just to stay local if I could, which isn't that easy on the coast. And if I can be in Cannon Beach, that's even better.

And then, just to be with an organization that is not harming the world, at a minimum. And, if it's helping, so much the better.

Housing options are few — and expensive — in Cannon Beach

Housing task force gets the lay of the land

By Erick Bengel
Cannon Beach Gazette

There are several reasons why working families can't find housing in Cannon Beach, and a lack of available, low-cost units hovers near the top of the list.

Todd Johnston, executive director of Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, told the city's Affordable Housing Task Force at a recent meeting that many of the city's low-wage employees must reside in Seaside, Astoria and surrounding areas, where living costs are cheaper, and commute to Cannon Beach.

In addition, many property owners actually have little incentive to create more affordable housing: They can make as much money in a month, or even

in a couple of weeks, renting out their units to short-term visitors with deep pockets as they can renting to a low-income family for a year, Johnston said.

Johnston is a member of the task force, which is investigating why medi-

sop, Columbia and Tillamook counties. One is a voucher program that will cover up to 70 percent of a tenant's rent if the figure is within 110 percent of what HUD considers "fair market rent."

Though this voucher

of a friend of a friend who agreed to lower their rent" so that a family or elderly person could live in the unit, he added.

More than two-thirds of renter households in Cannon Beach are considered "rent burdened," which means they spend between 30 and 50 percent of their income on housing needs, according to a report prepared by City Attorney Tammy Herdener in the fall of 2013. Nearly one-fourth of households that are buying their homes also are considered rent burdened.

Because Cannon Beach property values are so expensive, many families earning the area's median income — roughly \$55,500 in Clatsop County in 2014 — are priced out of the city's housing market, according to the report.

More than two-thirds of renter households and nearly one-fourth of households that are buying their homes in Cannon Beach are considered 'rent burdened'

an-income families cannot afford to rent or buy housing in Cannon Beach. The task force will develop recommendations to increase affordable housing in town.

The Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, which administers federal Housing and Urban Development funds, runs several programs that provide access to "safe and decent" affordable housing in Clat-

son program "could have a big impact" on Cannon Beach's affordable housing problem, the people who use the vouchers in Cannon Beach seem to be exceptions, Johnston said. Oftentimes, "the landlord is a friend

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