

Simmons steps down as member of academy board



Phil Simmons, center, with board members and students of the Cannon Beach Academy in 2016.

Phil Simmons resigns after years of service

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

The Cannon Beach Academy is in search of a new board member.

Phil Simmons, a longtime Cannon Beach Academy supporter, is taking a step back and resigning from the academy's board of directors.

Simmons is one of the original supporters who was at the forefront of keeping a school in town after Seaside School District closed Can-

non Beach Elementary School in 2014 due to budget shortfall and tsunami inundation concerns. After five years on the board, Simmons said he felt a need to "take a break" and submitted his resignation this month.

Simmons said he chose to resign as an active member of the board to make more time for travel and family, but intends to continue attending meetings and be involved with the school.

"I'm still amazed we've been able to pull it off," Simmons said, reflecting on his time with the academy. "What seemed to be an impossible challenge five years ago, through the perseverance

of so many allowed us to not only open a school, but do quite well."

In the last five years, Simmons played an integral role in securing the school's charter, fundraising efforts and grant writing.

"His drive, belief and determination is what got us here," said board president Kellye Dewey.

"He kept us going through so many trials and tribulations," board secretary Patti Rouse added. "He's been invaluable."

With Simmons departure, the board is looking fill his role as the school approaches new ventures, including expanding the grades up to third

grade next school year, hiring more staff and expanding facilities like the playground and kitchen to accommodate a growing student body. As the academy becomes more established, the board is also looking to set up a formal fundraising committee to encourage a more steady stream of funding for years to come.

While there will be more growing pains to come, Simmons offered some advice to whoever takes his place.

"Throughout this process, many of the decisions we made were not what we thought we were going to do, but they ended up being the best decision," he said. "Keep an open mind."

Nature photographer Hodges lives his dream amidst the mountains and the sea

New gallery showcases a career's worth of images

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Randall Hodges has always loved hiking.

A Eugene native, many of his childhood memories involve fishing and walking the trails with his mom throughout the Pacific Northwest.

"The first time I hiked above treeline, man - I was totally addicted," he said.

But what he loved equally as much was taking photos of the beautiful sights. After cresting a timberlined ridge or hiking to a lighthouse at sunrise, he would try to explain to people how much more beautiful these scenes were in person than the photos could show.

"Then I realized I needed to learn how to take a better photo that would explain itself," Hodges said.

So what if, he thought, he could make his two favorite things his life's work?

This leap of faith blossomed into a long career that has led Hodges to the North Coast. After decades of dreaming, earlier this month he finally realized one of his biggest career goals: to open his photo gallery, "Images of the West" in Cannon Beach.

It was a long and winding road to get here - quite literally. Since beginning his photography career, Hodges has hiked more than 27,000 miles all over the West Coast to get the dramatic nature shots that hang on his wall.

In many ways, hiking was a refuge. It's where he found peace after quitting his band, which inspired his move to northwestern Washington more than 30 years ago. It's where he went after he decided to quit his 12-year tenure as a high-end chef in Seattle, a career with which he was growing disillusioned.

He decided the way to get paid to hike was through his love of photography.

"I've always been known as a hiking photographer. So one really bad day at the restaurant, I locked myself in my office and I wrote a to-do list that said in one year I had to quit my job," he said. "Then one year later, I did."

To get established as a



Photographer Randall Hodges taking shots of Mount Rainier.

photographer, he traveled 26 times a year for 14 years to present his photography at every art show he could find in the Pacific Northwest.

But after a few too many days of blustering winds knocking over his exhibit booth tents, Hodges made it a goal to open his first brick-and-mortar gallery in Edmonds, Washington, four-and-a-half years ago. He then jumped on the chance to open another in Cannon Beach after seeing his dream property on Hemlock Street open up earlier this year.

"It encompasses everything I love about my business and photography. (Cannon Beach is a) great location to shoot pictures, and a fantastic town separate from anywhere else you go," Hodges said.

What makes Hodges work stand apart from the others, he said, is that every image is produced in the camera - that

means no Photoshop, no editing. Instead, he has honed old film techniques to create the images he wants. Sometimes it will take him years to get the perfect photo. Sometimes it takes visiting the same site 22 times if the lighting isn't correct, he said.

His commitment to authenticity doesn't go unnoticed, he said. He has made a whole business out of teaching people uninterested in learning post-production editing techniques his method in photography classes.

"In an age where you aren't sure if you are looking at a real image anymore, people know they are seeing what I saw when I took that photo. They are standing right next to me on that beach and on that mountain, and they know it look liked that."

For the next few years, Hodges will be managing the gallery remotely from Ed-

monds until his wife retires from her position. But once they make the move down, they are here to stay, he said.

"We hope to be in Cannon Beach for at least 15 years," he said. "That's the dream, and we just have to make it work."

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