

Arts & Life

Life: Martin Barnes, (503) 589-8945, life@statesmanjournal.com

Sunday, May 24, 2009

Southern Mexico

A PHOTO ESSAY



The Decker family, Antonia (from left), Phil, Irma and Alejandra, on top of the Mayan temple at Cobá in Quintana Roo.



A local family spends a month driving through our neighbor to the south, camera in hand



A pyramid dating from the year 900, represents the Serpent-God Kukulkan.



A view looking out from the cathedral in the main square in the city of Oaxaca.



Couples gather at dusk at the plaza in the heart of Merida.

Phil Decker is an elementary school principal in Salem. Before his career as an educator, he worked as a documentary photographer and writer in the United States and Mexico. He studied at the International Center of Photography in New York City.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PHIL DECKER
Special to the Statesman Journal

Although my wife, Irma, grew up in the urban bustle of Mexico City and the quiet desert town of Cocuil, Sonora, she had barely explored her own country. She wanted to travel deep into Southern Mexico, a key landscape to experience her nation's colonial and indigenous roots. This was the impetus for our three and a half week road trip during July 2008. Further, we wanted to expose our daughters, Alejandra (then 14 years old) and Antonia (then 12), to more of their Mexican heritage. In my 20s, I traveled throughout Mexico, while working as a documentary photographer and as the coordinator of a village banking program. For me, I hoped to rekindle my "photographic eye" and revisit Southern Mexico, while enjoying a family road trip.

We flew into Cancun, and then drove about 30 minutes south to the sleepy town of Puerto Morelos on the shores of a national park dedicated to preserving a huge coral reef ... a site for fantastic snorkeling. We spent a week in Puerto Morelos, using this as a base to explore Mayan villages, cenotes and archeological sites.

See Your Travels, 6D

Share your travels

Would you like to share your latest vacation or are you planning a trip you'd like to tell others about. Call Heather Rayhorn, (503) 589-0920, or e-mail her at hrayhorn@StatesmanJournal.com to be part of Your Travels.

Inside

Swine flu warnings downgraded; deals abound
Page 6D

Online

See more of the Deckers' photos online at www.StatesmanJournal.com

Girlchoir members ready their voices

Willamette singers polish their sounds for concert

BY BARRARA CURTIN
Statesman Journal

The Willamette Girlchoirs for girls who love to sing — and who are willing to work to get it just right.

The choir's 55 members rehearse weekly in sessions so intense they cover what might take three rehearsals for a school choir to achieve.

Students learn not only how to sing but about music theory and how to control their bodies to produce the most pleasing sounds. They present three concerts a year, including one this Saturday. They travel to perform in such places as Disneyland and New York's Lincoln Center.

"Every day is a new excitement,"

summed up Elizabeth Soper, 10, before a rehearsal last week.

Soper speaks from experience; a fifth-grader from Jefferson, she has been a choir member since first grade. She's in Bellissima, the intermediate choir; Doleo is for beginners and Bella Voce, for advanced singers.

The nonprofit organization draws members for a variety of reasons, from several communities. Kathleen Henderson, 14, of Salem is homeschooled ("since birth," she adds), so she has enjoyed the chance to meet girls "from all different backgrounds all different schools." Katie Keene, 16, of Keizer, loves to sing, but there's no choir available at her school, Early College High School.

Katie Wilson, 16, has plenty of musical opportunities at McNary High

See Girlchoir, 2D

At a glance

WHAT: Concert, "How Can I Keep From Singing"

WHEN: 3 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: First United Methodist Church, 600 State St.

TICKETS: \$8 for adults, \$6 for students through 18 years and seniors 62 and older; available at the door

AUDITIONS: June 2 and 4 for 2009-10 choir season. Girls in grades 3-12 welcome; call (503) 370-6383 for appointment

BEGINNERS: Two 10-week classes offered for first- and second-graders; call office for details

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The colonial city of Merida, Yucatan, bursts with colors.



All day long, boats of tourists from across Lake Catemaco arrive at the Ecological Reserve of Nancyaga, Veracruz, for guided tours of the rainforest.



A stall in the Mercado de Artesanias (craft market) in the city of Oaxaca. PHIL DECKER | Special to the Statesman Journal

Your Travels

Continued from 11

Then we hit the road, crossing the flat low jungle of the Yucatan. We stopped to marvel at Chichen Itza, then headed into the colorful colonial city of Merida. We were lucky to arrive on a Sunday, to catch the weekly celebration in the main plaza, complete with local cuisine, craft stands and live music at dusk.

Leaving Merida, we drove through the state of Campeche, hugging the vast Gulf Coast. Once in the state of Tabasco, we drove through enormous swamps, until we reached the calm shores of Lake Catemaco, nestled in the mountain jungles of Veracruz.

At Lake Catemaco, we stayed in a rustic cabin in an ecological preserve called Nancyaga. The reasonable price of the cabin included daily massages, mud baths and dips in natural pools of mineral water. Plus, we borrowed canoes to explore the lake, paddling close to islands inhabited by monkeys and exotic birds.

After several days in our Nancyaga paradise, we piled back into the car, bought a box of mangos and crossed the mountainous state of Oaxaca, twisting and turning up and down a treacherous road for eight hours, finally arriving in the city of Oaxaca, nestled in a tight lush valley, just before nightfall. For a few days we explored the vast markets of Oaxaca, focusing on indigenous food and crafts.

Our car was crowded with cardboard boxes packed with green clay plates, tubs of black mole, flower-embroidered huipiles and an oversized metal tortilla press, as we swerved down the mountain road to the Pacific Coast, emptying into the town of Puerto Escondido. There we caught our breath and enjoyed a swim in the warm ocean, together with pelicans and



On the road from Yucatan, we passed through the state of Campeche and stopped along the road to savor pollo asado (char-broiled chicken).

fisherman. Saying goodbye to Oaxaca, we journeyed through the mountains along the coast until descending into the famous tourist town of Acapulco, in the state of Guerrero. Here we had a room reserved in a fancy resort, so we could recover from the long road trip. Yet we wound up spending little time at the Mayan Palace; rather, we were attracted to the nearby neighborhood behind the Wal-Mart. We sampled food stands, visited open markets and bathed in lively crowded beaches where locals hang out.

The last leg of our adventure took us to Mexico City, where Irma's aunt, Mago, welcomed us into her home. In Mexico City, we caught up with relatives and organized a few excursions, including the canal of Xochimilco and the awesome ruins of Teotihuacan. From Mexico City, we flew back to Portland filled with images of Mexico's complex Spanish and indigenous roots, of its natural beauty, of its culinary splendor and of its profound people.

Phil Decker can be reached at phildecker@peopletape.com

Swine flu warnings downgraded

MEXICO CITY — Mexico City lowered its swine flu alert level from yellow to green on Thursday, and the mayor said "we can relax" now that there have been no new infections for a week.

Mayor Marcelo Ebrard said the change means the risk of contagion is low, the situation is under control and the images of countless people wearing blue surgical masks in cars, sidewalks, restaurants and theaters can be consigned to history.

Meanwhile, a group of resorts in Mexico are so sure you won't get swine flu there that they're offering three free trips if you do.

"The 'Flu Free Guarantee' represents our certainty that Mexico is a safe and healthy destination," said spokesman Alex Zozaya.

The participating properties are Zoetry Wellness

& Spa Resorts, Secrets and Dreams Resorts & Spas, Azal Hotels by Karisma, El Dorado Spa Resorts & Hotels by Karisma, and Royal Resorts.

The resorts are located in Cancun, Riviera Maya and Playa del Carmen.

George Hobica, founder of AirfareWatchdog.com, says flights to Mexico are also on sale.

"What we're finding is not just that fares are low, but that they're low for travel through next winter with no jacking up of prices for peak season, and that many routes now have no advance purchase requirement," he said. "Airlines are bending over backward for those making decisions at the last minute, as well as for those wishing to travel over the winter. They're doing this for obvious reasons — fill up those seats."

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Anniversary

Heidt 50th Anniversary



James and Rosemary (DuTeil) Heidt are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary! They were married on May 23, 1959, in Eugene, Ore. Family moments are very special to them and they have raised five children: Greg, Joe, Shelly, Tom, and Steve. They have really enjoyed their five grandchildren: Amy, Keith, Nicole, Zach, and Trask. The family is celebrating with a cruise in the Fall.

Jim and Rosemary live in Salem and have been members of St. Joseph's Catholic Church for over forty years. They are now retired after owning and operating Sunbeam Insulation.

We love you Mom and Dad!

Graduation

Congrats Eric!



Congratulations Eric Brooks on your May 15 graduation from U.S. Marine Corps boot camp, 1st Battalion Charlie Company at MCRD. Good luck in your upcoming infantry training. Stay safe and thank you for serving our country!

We are extremely proud of you and love you very much.

Your Proud Family



Great Job!



Engagements

Neufeldt ~ Burgess



Mr. and Mrs. Ren Neufeldt, along with their family, are excited to announce the engagement of their daughter Michelle Lee Neufeldt to Clinton Robert Burgess. Michelle is a Registrar with Salem Hospital. Clint is the son of Gregg Burgess and Lana Rimer of Albany, Ore.; he is an Electrician with G&E Electric. An August wedding is planned at Cubanissimo Winery, followed by a honeymoon in Cancun, Mexico.

Congratulations Michelle and Clint!

Lee ~ Schreengost



The proud parents of Rachel Lee and Adam Schreengost are very pleased to announce their engagement. Rachel, a 2005 graduate of Sisters High School. Adam a 2003 graduate of West Salem High School. They are both LPNs in the U.S. Army, stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington.

Kintz ~ Newhardt

David Newhardt is the son of Sally Johnson of Salem, Ore.

Kathleen Kintz is the daughter of the late Raymond and Alice DeYoung of Beaverton, Ore.

David and Kathleen reside in Renton, Wash.

The wedding date will be announced soon and will take place in Hawaii.



Weddings

Ontko ~ Heuberger



Rachel Ontko and Jared Heuberger were married on September 13, 2008 at The Ontko Ranch in Prineville, Oregon. The officiants were Pastor Chris Blair and Deacon Steve Tabor.

The bride's parents are Steve and Lori Ontko of Prineville and the groom's parents are Dan and Cindy Heuberger of Sublimity.

Maid of Honor was Erin Ontko. The bridesmaids included Nicole Ontko, Nicole Muller, Libby Rodgers, and Jessie Heuberger. Flower girls were Tobi Hanes and Brooke Herrmann. Best man was Josh Heuberger. The groomsmen were Justin Heuberger, Peter Etzel, Casey Spike, Ben Ward, Kyle Ontko, and Chris Warner.

The couple honeymooned in Alaska. The couple will reside in Sublimity.

Hoover ~ Beasley



William Beasley and Claire Hoover were married April 12, 2009 at Bencor House in Junction City, Ore. Groom's attendants were Bestman, Ken Simmons, Groomsman, Andy Simmons, and Darrin Combs. Bride's attendants were Matron of Honor, Melissa Simpson. Bridesmaids, Bethany Hoover, and Becca Niles. The couple will reside in Salem.

Birthday

Happy 80th Birthday, "Mother"



Rosemary Britt - sister, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, great-great-grandmother, and friend has reached a milestone in her life. She was born May 24, 1929 in Furewell, Texas.

Today, we want to honor you and we are looking forward to many more celebrations to come.

We love you, Mother. Your family

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