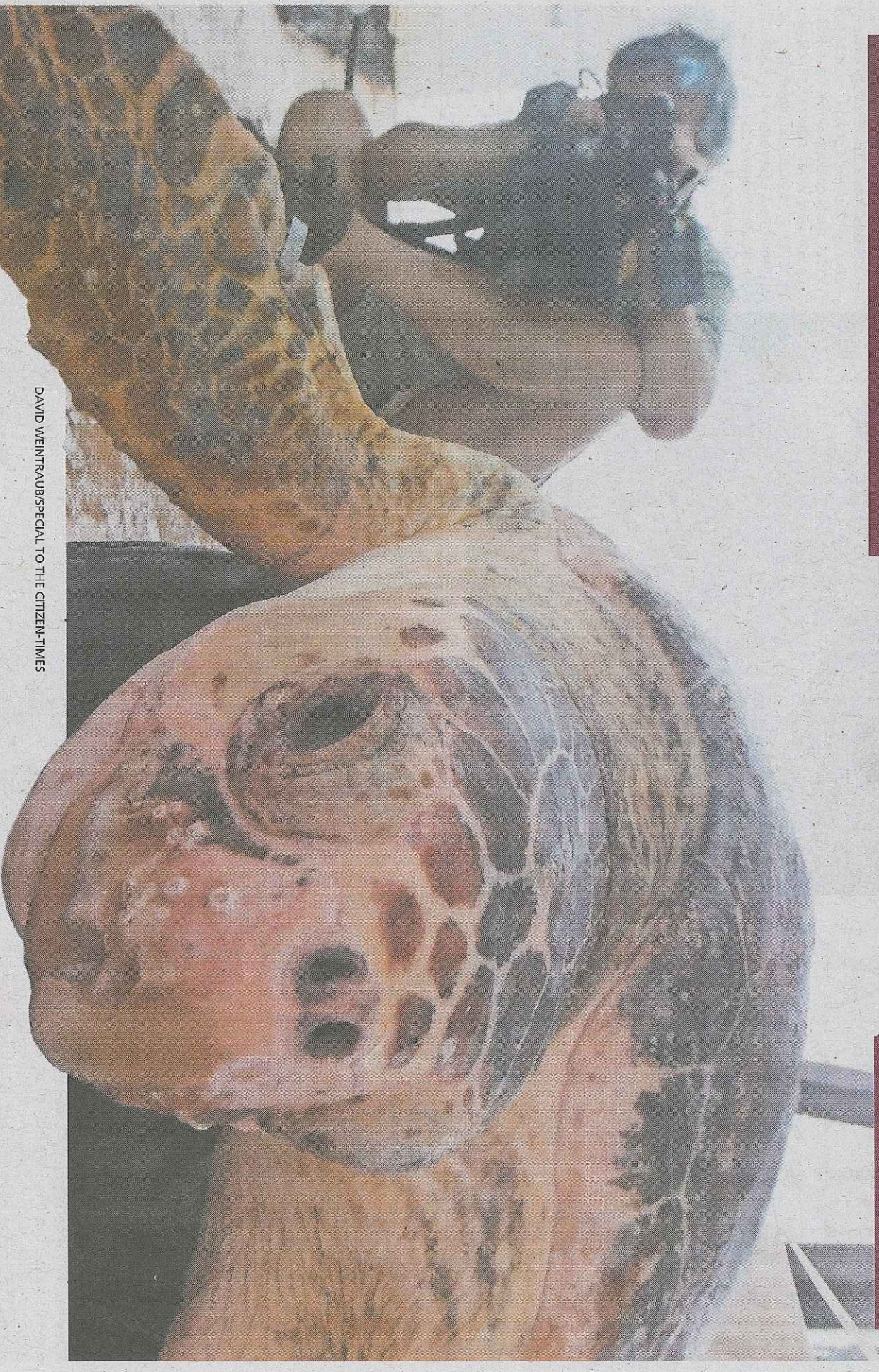


LIVING



Busy with a banjo: George Banks of the Stony Creek Boys. 2D

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DAVID WEINTRAUB/SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN-TIMES

CALL OF THE SEA TURTLES

WNC filmmaker's acclaimed 'Ancient Mariner' documentary debuts here

BY KAREN CHAVEZ
KCHAVEZ@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

They're not furry and cuddly like golden retrievers, or "useful" in letting us ride around on their backs like horses, but there's just something undeniably irresistible about turtles.

From the birth of Earth and mankind, there seems to have been this people-turtle connection, sometimes in a love-you-so-much-I-want-to-eat-you destructive way, but also in going-to-the-ends-of-the-Earth-to-save-you way.

That timeless, mystical, almost religious bond between humans and turtles is the subject of "Call of the Ancient Mariner," a documentary by Asheville-area filmmaker David Weintraub. The film will premiere at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, at The North Carolina Arboretum and Friday in Hendersonville.

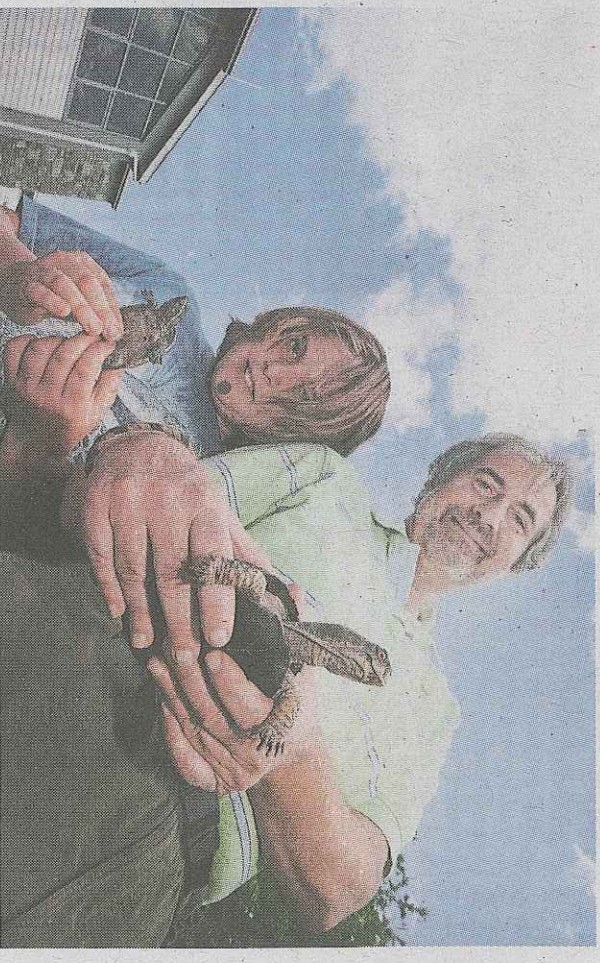
Weintraub, former executive director of the Environmental and Conservation Organization (now Mountain True), shot the film over three years up and down the coasts of North Carolina and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, interviewing biologists, turtle experts, turtle lovers, Native tribal leaders, archaeologists, government officials and others, and all of the original music was created by local musicians. Much of the film he shot with the help of his 12-year-

IF YOU GO

The Asheville screening of "Call of the Ancient Mariner" will be 6:30 p.m. Thursday, at the N.C. Arboretum, near the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 393. The Hendersonville debut will be 7 p.m. Friday at the Unitarian Fellowship, 409 E Patterson St. off of Kanuga Avenue.

Tickets are \$10. Buy them at www.saveculture.org or call 828-692-8062 or the Arboretum at 828-665-2492.

The film is a kickoff to The N.C. Arboretum's Reptile and Amphibian Week, June 23-27, with activities and programs to encourage interest in science and science careers, to spread awareness of the roles reptiles and amphibians play within ecosystems and to promote conservation behaviors, including preserving habitats, reporting observations and leaving wildlife in the wild. Visit www.ncarboretum.org.



ANGELI WRIGHT/AWRIGHT@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

Documentary maker David Weintraub poses with his son, Jonah, 12, and two of the North Carolina Arboretum's turtles, Bart and Shelly, recently. Weintraub will be premiering his documentary, "Call of the Ancient Mariner," at the Arboretum on June 11. He said the film is about "man's love affair with turtles that goes back since the dawn of man itself."

TOP: David Weintraub films a loggerhead turtle aboard the Georgia Bulldog, a turtle expedition vessel used by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and the Georgia DNR and Florida Wildlife Commission, to assess the health of sea turtles at sea. Weintraub spent a week with them in 2013 filming their activities for his film, "Call of the Ancient Mariner."

See SEA TURTLES, Page 3D

San Andreas IS NOT WITHOUT ITS FAULTS

BY BRUCE C. STEELE

The disaster movie "San Andreas" spares no pixels to depict the utter destruction of Hoover Dam, Los Angeles and San Francisco. It makes the similar 1974 flick, called simply "Earthquake," look like a movie of the week produced for an obscure website (although "San Andreas" could have benefited from the short-lived Sensurround technology that shook moviegoers in their seats).

For goodness sake, see the thing in 3-D, because otherwise you'll miss the fun of all the falling debris, flying shipping containers, collapsing skyscrapers and so on. This movie has all its chips bet squarely on its visual effects, and they mostly pay off. It may not be as perversely apocalyptic as "2012" or as creative in its ruin as "The Day After Tomorrow," but it's in the same league of awesome cheesiness.

The downside is that the catastrophe is so utterly impersonal. Sure, LAPD chopper rescue hero Ray (Dwayne Johnson) may be flying around in a helicopter — and later, an airplane and a motorboat — to rescue his wife (Carla Gugino) and daughter (Alexandra Daddario), but outside of Ray's family and two British brothers who latch onto the daughter, the peril is pure cartoon. When Ray finally acknowledges there are other people at risk and saves a couple dozen lives outside A T&T Park, it's a jarring break with the film's otherwise unbroken creed: Only extras and bad guys have to die. Pay no attention to those screaming hoards.

Sea turtles

Continued from Page 1D

old son Jonah, who Weintraub said became so much of a turtle expert, he was in some cases informing the experts.

The film is already receiving high praise. It played to packed houses in March where it won Best of the Festival at the Charleston Film Festival.

Dave Owens, a biologist at the University of Charleston, South Carolina, is one of the experts interviewed in the film. Owens has been studying turtles and working on turtle conservation for more than 40 years.

"I'm biased, but it's a really well-done documentary. I'm a strong conservation biologist, but the tone of conservation is so negative that people aren't hearing it anymore," Owens said. "What David did in his film is he talked about some of the positives, the projects we've done that are working to save turtles."

Owens said he also appreciated the emphasis on the human turtle connection.

"There's always been a strong interest in turtles, almost a religious aspect to it. He brings out this almost mystical, mythical side to turtles. They're like teachers — persistent, very hardy, tough individuals that do amazing migrations, all over the world; they're very adaptable. When you're trying to give a value to animals, the real bottom line is why does it just have to be a value to humans?"

Lifelong fascination with turtles

Weintraub, who is now the executive director of the Center for Cultural Preservation, which produced the film,



Dwayne Johnson and Carla Gugino star in "San Andreas."

WARNER BROS./AP

There's a reason the 1970s disaster masterpiece, "The Poseidon Adventure," came with the now legendary tagline, "Who will survive?" For one thing, a movie loaded with stars is just more fun, and stars can often elicit audience sympathy with minimal screen time. But more important, the more characters you follow, the more likely some of them are to fall to fiery deaths, which keeps the suspense high. And the more story lines you have — for example, on different floors of "The Towering Inferno" — the more aspects

said he was always a "nature boy," but the problem was he was born and raised in an apartment building in Brooklyn.

"Nature for me was opening our sixth-floor window and listening to the sounds of sirens going by," he said.

But at age 7, Weintraub's parents took the family to the Adirondack Mountains in New York for a vacation and that's when he became a nature nut.

"It was as if someone had taken the veil off my eyes. The kids would be out walking in woods until dinner, catching frogs and snakes and salamanders, anything that slithered or hopped. Nature became so precious to me," he said.

His first pet was a box turtle named Spike. He got lost somehow, but months later turned up under Weintraub's bed in a bunch of dust bunnies. His next turtle experience was when he and his wife spent an anniversary on an island off Charleston, South Carolina, and saw his first turtle patrol, who were excavating a loggerhead turtle nest.

"When they opened it, 95 baby turtles came running out in all directions. They told us to put our feet out to guide the turtles to the water. I was immediately smitten by this experience, not just by the turtles, but watching hundreds of people who gathered to watch. It was fascinating."

He wound up sticking around to volunteer with the turtle patrol and learned so much about the plight of sea turtles — all seven species are considered endangered mostly due to habitat destruction, commercial fishing practices and ocean pollution — and their connection to humans.

"I thought, what a fascinating way of telling the story of conservation, not through the lens of guilt and not being

of the disaster you can dramatize. Alas, "San Andreas" goes the "Godzilla" (2014) route and opts for a small family drama played out amid utter devastation. Johnson is a nice, appealing guy, but he can't conjure up "Ordinary People" with a few hackneyed lines of dialogue and some flashbacks. The rest of the cast is competent but unmemorable. Paul Giamatti has some scenes playing a scientist, but he's only briefly in danger and clearly just cashing a paycheck.

So I choose to view "San Andreas" as

the stewards that we should be, but through the lens of innate connection we have with nature," Weintraub said.

"The typical environmental films make us feel so bad about what we've done. It's not motivating. So I thought, what a wonderful canvas — looking at this tremendous relationship between humans and turtles."

Weintraub found that hundreds, if not thousands, of cultures had turtles as deities — symbols of fertility of longevity. They are known to live more than 100 years.

He said the first writing by man was inscribed by the Chinese thousands of years ago on the back of a turtle shell. The first coin ever created by the ancient Greeks had the likeness of a sea turtle. The Maya, considered one of the world's most sophisticated ancient cultures, Weintraub said, created their entire accounting system based on turtle scutes, or indentations on turtle shells.

"What's fascinating about turtles is what makes them so threatened," he said. "They migrate and come back to the most vulnerable place in the world — the beaches — which are facing major challenges. The oceans are rising, beaches are disappearing, development is taking away habitat."

He said commercial fishing, especially shrimp trawler nets, have had a huge impact on turtles. Somewhat new improvement in nets, known as TEDs, or turtle excluder devices, are helping, he said. But ocean pollution, including the 700 million tons of plastic floating the seas, is also harming turtles, he said. It looks like food to turtles, but once they eat it, it can kill them.

"This creature is our only living dinosaur. It survived three extinctions over 100 million years. The question for us is, will they survive us?" Weintraub

Neufeld

Continued from Page 1D

send you anywhere you want to go, but you can't go to Duke."

Rec Park days

After a knee injury in college, Weldon redirected his energies toward public works.

At age 22, he applied for a job at the Recreation Park in Asheville. He had experience there. While in high school, he and a few other boys had been hand-picked by E.C. "Deacon" Greene, Asheville's commissioner of parks, for summer jobs at the new facility.

The park was a social center at that

Recreation Park troop.

It was Dermid's job to get the park's receipts to the city in the morning. Weldon often found Charlie oversleeping at 7 a.m.

"He would pick up a shoe," Dermid once recalled, "and throw it against the wall over my head and wake me up. One morning out there ... when I did roll out of bed, there was a black snake in the bed with me. And I'm sure he put it there. He probably got 'Boob' Praytor (who was in charge of the zoo) to handle it for him."

Years later, when Dermid was hospitalized for a month, there was Weir, every morning at 7 a.m., waking him up with the delivery of the day's newspaper.

The boss

"Never hire anybody if you don't

Weir responded, "You just let a bulldozer hit one of those poles. They'll move them all the next day."

A couple of years later, yet another lane was needed on Tunnel Road, but this time, the city did not have the right-of-way to accomplish it. Dermid obtained the permissions he needed from every property owner except one, Buck Buchanan, owner of the city's most popular drive-in.

So, Weldon said, "I'll tell you what you do, Charlie ... go over there and start the work. Widen right down to Buck's property and go around Buck and start again." Subsequently, Buck signed a right-of-way.

Favors were granted, business executed, and power wielded with good humor. Weir never lost his cool, his secretary, Margaret Simmons recalled.

The era of Weir

Weir represented a certain era in Asheville politics. He'd inherited the job from Pat Burdette, who'd become the third city manager after Asheville had switched to the manager/council system after the Depression.

Burdette used to arrive at work at 10 a.m., leave at 4, and take a two hour lunch, said Simmons. Burdette used workaholic Weldon as his assistant, and, in 1935, promoted him to director of public works, a position he held for 15 years.

As city manager, Weir pushed through such projects as the pipeline from the North Fork Reservoir, the Asheville Regional Airport, the Civic Center, and the civic development of Woodfin Street.

In 1968, he resigned his position when his political machine had lost its