

The Tully News

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“Just Add Water”

Not once during the course of his presentation did David Owen Brown talk about what camera he used, what lens he used, shutter speed, aperture setting, or ISO. Despite all of that his presentation at the Tully High School auditorium on March 17 was about photography – not how to do it but rather how to communicate with it. While his presentation included many gorgeous photographs, there were also many that were not so pretty but left a definite message.

David Owen Brown is a worldwide producer, videographer, photographer and lecturer who has specialized in water related subjects. His work has aired on NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, the Discovery Channel and National Geographic television. He holds numerous awards and as a member of the Cousteau team, he participated in filming expeditions on the vessels Calypso and Alcyone for over 7 years. He has explored above and below water environments from Papua New Guinea to Alaska. His current

project involves underwater documentation of the Finger Lakes region of New York. Brown's cameras have recorded the wealth of wildlife and cultures that thrive wherever there is water. He weaves these experiences into a visual narrative of his global travels.

He calls his presentation water travels and notes that it is a double entendre because most of his travels have been in or around water but also because water gets around.

“The water that we are sipping from our water bottles now has been through many, many, many iterations and through many interconnected parts of this planet of ours and it is the stuff of life as we know it,” he stated. “I'm enchanted by the stuff and the stuff that lives in it”

He was raised in upstate New York - Ithaca, where he graduated from high school and then went to Cornell University for his undergraduate degree. While getting his undergraduate degree he started going to sea and found himself divided between fresh and saltwater. But there's no difference, he stated - because it's all very much interconnected.

6 Mile Creek in Ithaca is his home turf. That's where he learned about being safe in water and all the things that live in water. After about 18 years away he has moved back to Ithaca and lives just around the corner from 6 Mile Creek where he taught his kids to swim.

The animal that got him started on his journey was the little red spotted newt and he became enraptured by amphibians. He noted that the ponds would often go dry in the summertime but “all you have to do is add water and the life emerges.”

During his undergrad days at Cornell he spent his summer seasons in Gloucester, Massachusetts studying and taking black and white photos of marine life. Occasionally when he ran out of black and white film he would load a roll of color. He sold some of the photos and realized that he could get paid for taking pictures. And as the saying goes the rest is history.



David Owen Brown displays some of the photos that he took on many journeys around the world. In addition to polar bears, there were photos of birds in the Amazon basin and fish from many areas of the globe. The one thing they all have in common, he says, is water. Without water, nothing lives.

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P.O. Box. 22
Tully, NY 13159
315-696-4693

Town Supervisor

William Lund

tullysupervisor@cnyemail.com

Editor

David Blatchley

Printer

Water - Cont'd

During the course of his photo presentation he talked about the people, places and animals which he felt fortunate to have photographed. He filmed environmental events such as the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill stating that steam cleaning oil off a beach was an exercise in futility. Since then he has dedicated his life's mission to documenting and protecting the earth's water supply.

"I started to realize that the human relationship to water and the living things in it was what made me happy to document," he stated.

Last year he created a film about hydrofracking and stated that he sees hydrofracking as

a huge threat to water. He said that it was inconceivable to him when he returned to Central New York that hydrofracking was even being considered.

"Water doesn't stay in one place - it travels," he stated, "and to take water out of circulation in the hydrologic cycle and to deliberately contaminate it in an irredeemable fashion and trade it for a nonrenewable resource such as natural gas makes no sense to me."

People will ask him, "isn't it strange to be in Indonesia in November and then come back and be filming in a stream in upstate New York?" And he answers, "The answer is no, it's not strange at all because it's the water that ties it all together."