

A day at sea with Captain Crystal



Captain Crystal Pesek of Steinhatchee's Crystal Sea Charters has been a licensed charter captain for five-and-a-half years -- a journey she started at 52 years of age.

By DEBRA BUTLER
Columnist

Ticking off a mental checklist, Capt. Crystal Pesek, owner of Crystal Sea Charters, methodically walks around her boat and trailer, making sure everything is secure and ready for the short drive to the Steinhatchee boat ramp. "Motor up, plugs in," she says, as she climbs into her truck.

Arriving at the boat ramp, Pesek confidently backs the trailer into the water, launches her boat, ties off to the dock and parks the truck and trailer in just a matter of minutes.

On the way back to her boat, Pesek stops short, kindly offering assistance to an older gentleman

having trouble loading his vessel.

After Pesek says a brief prayer for our safety and a good day of fishing, we are soon heading out to the flats aboard her 22-foot Mako.

Pesek, age 58, has been a licensed charter captain for five-and-a-half years.

"Who knew I would pursue this route in my 50's? Well, God knew! Never too late to begin a new adventure," said Pesek.

When it comes to fishing, Pesek's personal preference is topwater.

Artificial baits and live shrimp are offered as options to her clients, but Pesek is in her element when using topwater lures.

"Buoyant and durable,

the secret to these topwater lures is mastering the "walk the dog" technique, which involves slightly twitching your rod tip during the retrieve to cause the lure to move in a side-to-side motion," she explained.

It's the challenge and sport of topwater fishing that mesmerizes Pesek.

While she enjoys inshore fishing, Pesek's husband favors diving and spearfishing offshore.

It was their differences in fishing preferences that led Pesek to study for her captain's license.

By obtaining her captain's license, Pesek has inspired others -- both men

and women -- to get their own license, including her next-door neighbor Nita Chester.

Pesek and her siblings grew up fishing in Ohio, and it was Pesek's friend Palmer Hodges of Steinhatchee that taught her how to fish local waters.

"He was my mentor and my confidence builder," she said.

The Peseks met Hodges, a local building contractor, when he initially reviewed their home renovation plans.

"As soon as he walked in the room and started talking, he reminded me of my dad. I told Larry, we are hiring Palmer, and no one else, to do the work," Pesek said.

From that moment on the three became close friends.

In addition to eating many meals at the Pesek's home, Hodges became Pesek's regular fishing buddy.

Hodges passed away from brain cancer on July 7, 2020, leaving Pesek without her favorite inshore fishing partner.

My day of fishing with Capt. Pesek was a successful one. We brought in a limit of keeper spotted seatrout and a nice "doormat" size flounder.

Twice when my line became tangled, Capt. Pesek's nimble fingers

Local Lady Anglers

Part One

Editor's Note: During the summer of 2020, a number of area female anglers were nominated as part of an online

contest to recognize some of Steinhatchee's "Top Female Anglers." Steinhatchee columnist Debra Butler was inspired to interview (and fish with) several of those nominated in an effort to raise awareness of female anglers. The following is the first in a series devoted to local female fishing captains

delicately untied the knots. Never once did she correct my awkward casting style, until I mentioned my desire to learn how to cast more efficiently.

Pesek's patient teaching shined through as she demonstrated the proper casting method.

Returning to the ramp, Pesek just as easily loaded her boat onto the trailer as she had launched it earlier.

"Motor up, chains down," she called out before getting into her truck.

Although she loves taking clients fishing, Pesek prefers scallop charters. Having a degree in elementary education sets her apart.

Standing on the bow of her boat, Pesek teaches her first-time scalloping clients the basics, including how to properly wear a mask and snorkel, how to float so their feet don't stir up the silt on the bottom and how to swim with the floats custom designed by Pesek and her husband Larry.

She has also been known to babysit the young children of clients on the boat while their parents scallop.

Pesek uses these opportunities to educate the children about marine life. Having taught childhood education at the college level, Pesek is right at home in these moments.

As a testament to Crystal and Larry Pesek's love for the Steinhatchee community, they are setting up an annual scholarship to be offered to both Taylor and Dixie County high

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Captain Crystal Pesek with a spotted sea trout.

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