Local writer talks waterfall book

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
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SENECA — Tom King watched a friend tumble over Whitewater Falls as a teenager. But instead of developing a fear of waterfalls, King fostered a deep respect for the wonders of the outdoors.

Forty years later, he published "Waterfall Hikes of Upstate South Carolina," a book containing more than 300 pages of maps, driving directions, trail directions, photos and descriptions of 125 waterfalls in Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties.

A native of Anderson, King grew up hiking in the mountains of the Upstate long before established trails were commonplace. As early as age 16, he and his friends would spend most of their weekends in the woods.

When King grew up and started a family, he didn't have as much time to indulge his hobby. But he and his wife, Faye, began hiking with their children as soon as the little ones' legs were long enough to walk the trails.

After working as the Anderson County appraiser and assessor for 25 years, King retired at the age of 55 and resumed his passion for hiking. Several times a week, he'd head up to the mountains, visiting familiar trails and waterfalls and collecting photos along the way.

"After trying to follow old trail guides, which contained out-of-date trail directions, I decided to write an up-to-date trail and waterfall guidebook," King said. "My friends and family loved all my photos of waterfalls and wildflowers, so those became part of the book as well."

Every hike he set out on, he'd carry a camera, a journal and a cassette tape recorder in his pack. When he returned home later that day, he'd transcribe all his notes.

He originally self-published the books, marketing and delivering them himself. But when a publisher offered to publish the book, King accepted. Within a few years, a second revised edition was published, containing about 30 more waterfalls he had added to the book. Seven years later, the book still sells about 1,000 copies every year.

King said he's not out to make money; he wants to encourage families to visit the breathtaking mountains and waterfalls and derive inspiration through their amazing beauty.

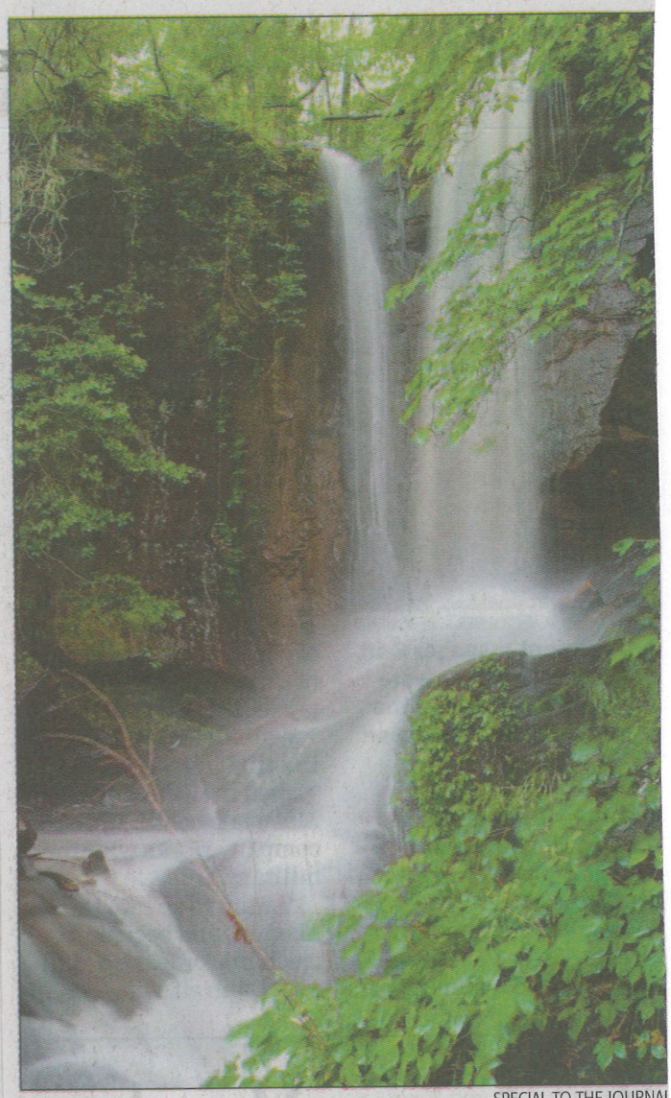
"A waterfall is not just something to look at — it's an experience," King said. "A physical and spiritual experience."

The physical component is the hike itself — the act of walking, hearing and seeing. The spiritual part King refers to is more of a personal internal experience.

"One time my wife and I were at lower Whitewater Falls, and an East Indian husband and wife went onto the observation platform and sat in lotus position and meditated for several minutes," King said. "They had a spiritual experience. Every time I see a waterfall, I have a spiritual experience."

King will discuss his book and offer book signings at the Pickens County Museum at 6 p.m. Thursday and 6:30 p.m. Monday at Unity and Love Worship Center in Walhalla.

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Clearwater Falls is one of 125 waterfalls in Tom King's book, "Waterfall Hikes of Upstate South Carolina."