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TROY R. BENNETT / THE TIMES RECORD

S. PETER LEWIS built a three-ton, two-story house in a 200-year-old pine tree in his Bridgton backyard. Then he published a book about it.



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S. PETER LEWIS' two-story treehouse has a stove for heat, two decks and a retractable ladder.

LIVING IN A TREEHOUSE

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• A Bridgton author enthralls Brunswick audience with story behind his dream house.

BY RACHEL GANONG

Times Record Staff

BRUNSWICK

On a quiet road in Bridgton, a 6,000-pound dream hangs in a tree.

But it also held the attention of more than 60 people, young and old, who came to Curtis Memorial Library Thursday night to hear writer S. Peter Lewis and illustrator Ted Walsh share tales from a two-year, 298-day treehouse-building saga in Lewis' Bridgton backyard.

On a whim that started in Colorado and returned his family to Maine, Lewis, 46, with his friends and family built a two-story, insulated treehouse complete with two porches, a wood stove, couch, desk and chess room in a majestic pine at the edge of his lawn. He spent \$5,000, lots of ingenuity and several thousand hours of labor from nearly every nice afternoon and Saturday for three years to build it, succumbing to what he called "adult-onset adolescence."

"I wouldn't do it again; it's too much," he said. But at the time, he followed his mother's



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BOOK EDITOR S. Peter Lewis, left, and illustrator Ted Walsh pose for a picture in the treehouse they built in Lewis' backyard in Bridgton. Hand-carved, tree-themed chess pieces adorn the wall.

advice: "Dreams need feet; they're not worth much stuck between your ears."

The result produced not only a 30-foot high retreat but an award-winning book called "The Treehouse Chronicles." The book vividly recounts the process of building his dream.

With its illustrations, scenic photographs and reflective passages, "The Treehouse Chronicles" is as much a nature paean as an

engineering manifesto. For the author, however, it's about people.

"So much of it revolves around my friends and family as about construction," Lewis said Monday, having just alighted from the treehouse's counter-weighted drawbridge.

The book's surprisingly broad subject material helped launch a successful debut into the publishing world.

When the distributor heard about the book, he was skepti-

cal. "How can you combine all these things and have it any good?" he asked," Walsh recalled.

Despite the distributor's concerns, their first national release has sold almost 2,000 copies since its publication in October with little publicity. "The Treehouse Chronicles" has been selected as a finalist for ForeWord Magazine's book of the year, given an American Design Award and

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featured on Home and Garden Television and Popular Mechanics magazine.

But the idea for the book didn't germinate until after another project fell through for the "nano-publishing" company the two run with another partner. In its place, Walsh suggested converting Lewis' treehouse journal into a book. They had both written and illustrated, but this was their first work of whimsy.

"A lot of my work as illustrator has been for medical texts," Walsh said before the Thursday presentation.

Lewis wrote newspaper articles, hiking guides and publications for SOLO wilderness medical school in Con-

AT A GLANCE

INFORMATION on how to find copies of "The Treehouse Chronicles" can be found at www.tmcbooks.com.

way, N.H., where both he and Walsh worked.

"We didn't really set out to have an environmental slant on this; it just made good sense," Lewis said.

Because he disliked the thought of boring holes into the majestic, 200-year-old pine supporting the treehouse, Lewis found a way to suspend the structure with cables from a fork in the tree. He and Walsh also found ways to allow tree branches to go through the treehouse.

"Since the tree is what's holding this up, the less invasive we can be the better,"

Walsh said.

But the two Yankees' good sense turned into appeal for another audience and attracted the attention of institutions such as Curtis Memorial Library's Cornerstones of Science program, which sponsored Thursday's talk to show how concern for nature can lead to environmentally sensitive science and technology.

"It's another way for us to connect people to nature on Earth Day," Jocelyn Hubbell, Cornerstones of Science coordinator, said, on why she invited Lewis and Walsh to talk so near the April 22 observance.

Hubbell said she was surprised by not only the number of people who attended but also the age spread of the audience who all came to hear about something that

"looked like Thoreau's cabin on the side of a tree."

"There were 7-year-olds, 12-year-olds, 20-year-olds" and older adults, she said, most of whom had questions and some of whom said they were going home to build a treehouse themselves.

By the time all questions had been answered, Walsh and Lewis's 60-minute talk stretched to two-and-a-half hours.

But of all the questions, Lewis said no one ever asked why he built the treehouse.

Hubbell, alluding to the universal appeal of both treehouses and dream-chasing, explained why that question wasn't necessary.

"We all understand why," she said.