

Polly Friedlander and Espy Foundation are featured in *Post-Intelligencer* story

By KEVIN HELMBIGNER
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SEATTLE — Polly Friedlander was the subject of a feature story in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* last Wednesday. Friedlander, who was the founding president of the Espy Foundation and has often been its executive director over the years, said, "I feel very excited that the information is out and people will begin to understand what we are doing (with the Espy Foundation) in Oysterville."

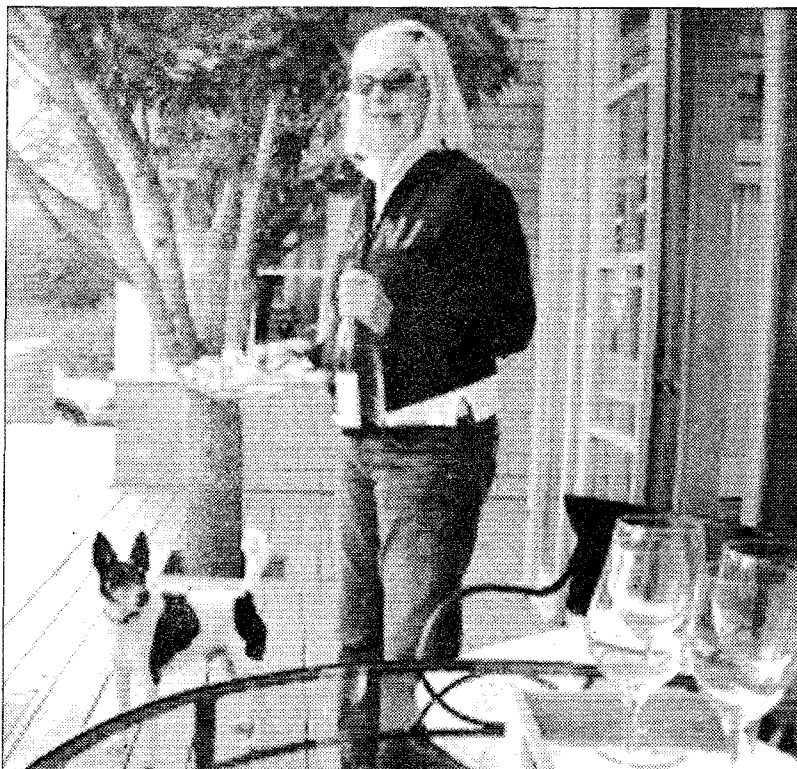
One of the key functions of the foundation is its residency program, where authors and artists from 11 states have come to Oysterville for month-long or longer retreats in the "bucolic and sweetly tempered escapes, free of interruption," according to *PI* music and dance critic, R.M. Campbell, who wrote the piece on Friedlander.

He said in the story, "Tucked at the end of the Long Beach Peninsula, between the thunder of the Pacific and the serene calm of Willapa Harbor (Bay), Oysterville is a pastoral setting in its purest form. There are deer and coyotes and sandpipers as well as salmon berries, Scotch broom, rhododendrons and chrysanthemums — there is power there."

Campbell noted, "In Oysterville, a family memoir of this town his grandfather co-founded in 1854, Willard R. Espy called the place a far reach from the rest of the world." Espy was a celebrated American author, most famous for his books on word play and his anthologies of light verse. Born and reared in Oysterville, he lived primarily in New York, but in 1998 he asked Friedlander to find a place in the village for his library. Friedlander knew Espy from the 1970s, when he came to her Pioneer Square art gallery for a book signing.

In thinking about his request, Friedlander came up with her own idea — make a place in Oysterville for creative people to work for short periods of time at artists' retreats. She explained, "I told Willard about my idea and, for the first time in my acquaintance with him, he was speechless!" He immediately agreed, and the Espy Foundation was formed a month later. None too soon as Espy passed away the next year.

"Standing in my garden one day in the afternoon after doing some weeding," Friedlander related, "I thought that this is a perfect place for artists to be because of the purity



JOAN STUART ROSS photo

Oysterville's Polly Friedlander has played a key part in keeping alive the legacy of the late Willard Espy, master wordsmith of the Peninsula and New York City.

of the air, the clarity of the environment, and the quality of the light. I thought if we can find a place for Willard's library, then why not a place for writers. I am not a writer, but I read a lot and I am not an artist, but I respond to all of those things. We got started by going to New York because that is where most of Willard's friends lived and we held a get-together at the Century Club." About \$40,000 was raised and the foundation was on its way.

Friedlander makes the four-hour commute between Seattle and Oysterville on a regular basis, in particular the first day of each series of residencies to give a dinner party for the fortunate participants and to make all the necessary introductions. Local residents are always included. Other draws, such as meetings, garden parties, miscellaneous social events and an annual summer party are held at her house and garden at the northern border of Oysterville.

At first, the Espy Foundation was limited to Northwest writers, but that was quickly amended to include writers throughout the United States. Two years ago visual artists were included. That was a natural extension for Friedlander, as she was well known in Seattle art circles in the 1970s with her Pioneer Square Gallery, which quickly

became one of the most important in town because of its exhibitions and its evenings of performance art according to Campbell's article.

That came to an end in 1977 when Friedlander had to close the gallery for financial reasons. For two decades she lived a more private life, linking up with Seattle businessman Robert Thurston, whose financial resources helped support the foundation and buy the necessary property in Oysterville. Their connection to the town is deep as they built a house 13 years ago, with Willapa Bay quietly "breathing" (Espy's word) only steps away, according to Campbell.

In late July the Espy Foundation launched a \$3 million capital campaign to develop permanent accommodations designed by Seattle architect George Suyama on four acres owned by the foundation. In years past, artists have lived in sundry rented period houses in Oysterville. In the new vision of the retreat, six cottages are planned, plus a greatly expanded Espy library and exhibition hall.

Polly Friedlander concluded by saying, "I am looking forward to the capital campaign. Developing the property will be a significant addition to Oysterville and to the entire Long Beach Peninsula. There will be a literary and artistic ripple affect here."