

Weimar native works to raise awareness of Southeast Texas nature

Charlie Herder recommends Houston Atlas of Biodiversity to hometown residents

Charlie Herder and his friends did their best to stop the construction. When they spotted the survey stakes, they pulled them up, chopped them up and burned them.

"I think we delayed the construction...by at least a year," Herder said.

What was it they were trying to stop from construction? A new business? A housing project?

No, just Interstate 10.

"When they started laying out Interstate 10 right through the middle of Colorado County...they came right through an area...(where) we went camping all the time...there was a great little swimming hole," Herder said. "And suddenly there were these surveyors showing up and driving all these stakes in the



Charlie Herder in his Houston office. The saddle was custom made for his father.

no place better in the world to be raised when it comes to lifestyle and just messing around with the frogs and turtles and waterskiing with your friends on the Colorado River. It's just a wonderful place."

Herder's experience growing up along the Colorado River instilled in him an appreciation for nature and outdoor recreation, he said. Living in Houston made him realize that people in urban environments don't have the outdoor opportunities that he had growing up.

"The ability as a young boy to be out in the country and to go

hunting and fishing any time I pleased, has turned out to be something that very few people in the cities hope to experience," Herder said. "And that's a shame, because it's a wonderful lifestyle."

Through Herder's work – and also as chairman of the George Foundation – he realized that Southeast Texas' natural areas are a regional asset that needs to be touted, appreciated and expanded.

"I'm very interested in green development," Herder said. "I think that people who leave space and land for nature, when

planning their new developments, will be much more successful."

Herder is a founding board member of Houston Wilderness, a nonprofit organization dedicated to spreading awareness about the unique environment and recreation opportunities in the 24-county region of Southeast Texas.

He wanted to help the organization, because he valued his childhood experiences, and because he became aware of the unfortunate view by some from other regions of the country that Houston doesn't have desirable outdoor recreation.

"Why shouldn't someone from Baltimore know about the Colorado River?" Herder said. "Or about the estuaries and bays on the Gulf Coast, or about the Big Thicket. All these beautiful places."

Houston Wilderness is setting out to build an appreciation of those assets, Herder said, and possibly along the way recruit more people to enjoy and protect the outdoors.

Houston Wilderness published the Houston Atlas of Biodiversity, a book that "tries to take each of those environmental assemblages and create a description of that for someone from New Jersey or California or Chicago," he said. The book can help people better understand the area, and "then maybe they will be less hesitant to think about this area for their own businesses, and to think good of Texas, like all of us Texans do."

This story was originally published in Charlie Herder's hometown newspaper, *The Weimar Mercury*

ground. We found out it was for a freeway, so we'd go out every weekend and chop up their stakes."

"But progress took place..."

Interstate 10 now takes Herder home each weekend. Home to Weimar from Houston, where he is co-chairman of the board of Colliers International in Houston, part of a global commercial real estate firm.

"Colorado County -- there is

