

Montreal Native to Make Documentaries on Local Marine Life

By DAVID LAZARUS

Staff Reporter

With a grey beard encircling his face, Kenn Feigelman doesn't exactly conjure up memories of Jacques Cousteau, the late and great undersea explorer.

Yet Feigelman, a Montreal native who says his parents were among the first families to inhabit Dollard des Ormeaux, is definitely making his mark in the deep.

And in fact, he's been doing so for almost 35 years.

In March, Feigelman, 60, was at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York to be inducted into the U.S.-based Explorers Club, which includes the likes of astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon.

And Feigelman announced in Montreal recently that he and his diving and exploration/film documentation company, Deep/Quest 2 Expeditions, were about to start shooting a 13-part underwater TV documentary series in Canada, three of which will be filmed in Quebec, in the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Those segments will capture the famed Beluga whales in Tadoussac, the shipwrecks of Iles-de-la-Madeleine, and the Blue whales of the Mignan Archipelago.

"This will be the first time something' like this is shot entirely in high definition," Feigelman announced at a press conference. "It is very exciting." On the other hand, he is also distraught by the pollution in those waters, which is causing high rates of cancer in the Beluga whales.

"Pollution is one of the main causes for the Belugas facing extinction," he said. "Lung cancer, testicular cancer - this was unheard of before. These documentaries will highlight their plight."

Feigelman, with his gregarious manner, speaks excitedly and passionately about many of his company's ambitious plans. What comes across is a profound and abiding love of science, ocean life and the fragile ecosystems that keep it all together. Feigelman said he founded Deep/Quest 2 in Montreal in 1973 as a one-year-project, but after the year was up, he wanted to keep the project going.

Feigelman's company, originally started as a non-profit organization, was the culmination of a sensibility he acquired from the time he was a little boy in the late 1950s watching *Sea Hunt* with Lloyd Bridges on television.

"I loved that show," he said with a chuckle.

At age 13, Feigelman started diving and eventually became a sports diver. He studied biological science at Concordia and McGill universities, and in the late 1960s, he taught scuba diving.

Deep/Quest 2's first journey was to the murky waters of Lake Champlain in Vermont and upper New York State, where Feigelman explored its depths looking for shipwrecks and finding historical artifacts dating back to the American Revolution, and the war of 1812.

That first venture earned Feigelman a doctorate from the College of Marine Arts in South Carolina.

Feigelman has led over 100 explorations as head of Deep/Quest 2, including searches for shipwrecks, coral reef studies, and examination of Cenotes - freshwater limestone sinkholes in Mexico.

Deep/Quest2 has also been to Cuba, Barbados, and Panama examining and filming animal life and coral reefs, as well as to Florida to raise awareness about the plight of the threatened manatees.

In 1988, Deep/Quest 2, which was based in Montreal until 1979 and thereafter in Ontario, acquired Canada's first underwater research habitat, called Sublimnos, designed by another Canadian underwater explorer, Dr. Joseph MacInnis, and submerged it in Lake Ontario near Point Traverse.

Feigelman said the idea was to look at the effects of artificial reefs on the freshwater ecosystem, but provincial funding for the project dried up with the election of the NDP government in 1990.

"Sublimnos became a dead duck," he said.

Feigelman said he was so frustrated that in 1991, Deep/Quest 2 was shut down. Feigelman began to work as a marketing consultant, but in December 2005, he revived Deep/Quest 2 - this time with both an educational and commercial orientation with the encouragement of his wife and close friends.

"That's when we rose from the ashes," he said.

Now with a slew of new sponsors behind him, Deep/Quest2 has set its ambitions higher than ever. With high definition cameras now the size of a "big bagel," Feigelman said plans are to organize expeditions for travelers to witness Deep/Quest 2's work and to travel the world - including to the Arctic - chronicling nature's work for posterity, as well as have his documentaries air on cable channels such as Discovery and National Geographic.

Feigelman said the plans for Deep/Quest 2 include going to already visited areas and to places such as Belize, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Colombia, the Galapagos Islands and others, recording life beneath the sea.

Plans also include returning to Mexico to capture the migratory route of whale sharks and Manta rays, "as they gorge themselves on plankton and krill during their annual rites of passage off Isla Holbox at the junction of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico."

Feigelman said the market for his work is there. "There's a great hue and cry for great nature films."