

Tour of capitols

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Salem man travels to every state capitol, photographing and writing about each for a new book



Jim Stembridge, semi-retired legislative committee administrator, has a new book: "Fifty State Capitols, the Architecture of Representative Government." KOBBI R. BLAIR | Statesman Journal



Written by **Barbara Curtin**

Salem's Jim Stembridge loves the Oregon Capitol, where he has worked since 1995 as a policy analyst and committee administrator. In fact, Stembridge loves any capitol — so much so that he has photographed and written about every one for his new book, "Fifty State Capitols: The Architecture of Representative Government."



"Built of white Georgia marble, the Rhode Island State House is in the usual form for bicameral legislative buildings: a large central dome flanked by two wings," Stembridge writes about the Providence, R.I., capitol.

Jim Stembridge | Special to the Statesman Journal

"I went around to try to document the buildings and how the buildings exemplify democracy and representative government and how they contribute to democracy and representative government," he explained.



This graceful dome in Jefferson City, Mo., is 171 feet high; many states have similar features. Missouri is among the states that have invited Stembridge to return for a book-signing event.
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The 12-by-9-inch paperback includes one full-page photo of each capitol's exterior, plus a second page with photo details and description of the building's special features.

Hinrich Muller of Salem laid out the text and 276 color photographs. The official publication date is June 6, but the book already is on sale online and at the Oregon Capitol Gift Shop.

The project has given Stembridge an excuse to travel during his semi-retirement (since 2003, he has worked only during legislative sessions).

"I love traveling, and I love capitols, so it just made sense for me to go traveling around," he said recently during an interview in the Capitol.

True to form, Stembridge insisted on first showing off some of his favorite details of the Oregon Capitol: blocked skylights that were about to be refurbished and staircases that give an unbroken view from the Senate to the House chambers.

He slipped outside to point out how the Capitol's engraved "State of Oregon" tends to get lost on the building's shady north face. He had to wait until June 21, when the sun was at its highest point of the year, to capture an image where the words popped out from the white marble.

DETAILS

Title: "Fifty State Capitols: The Architecture of Representative Government"

Author: Jim Stembridge

Cost: \$27.95

Publisher: Coho Publishing, Salem

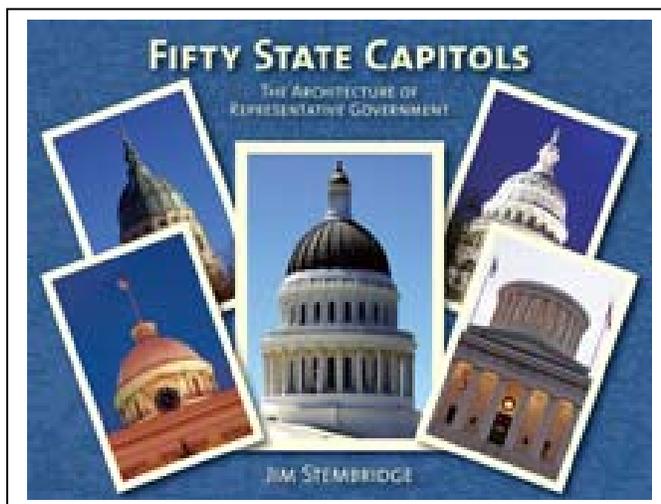
ISBN: 978-0-9830292-0-5

Capitol or capital? A capitol is the building in which a state legislature meets; a capital is the city that serves as the seat of government.

He did most of his research on two long, looping, cross-country trips, accompanied by Ruthless, his black lab/German shepherd.

Armed with pamphlets and Internet research, he'd camp out in a capital, then rise early enough to shoot at first light. He used a Sony digital single-lens reflex camera with a tripod.

An early start offered another advantage, he said: He needed car-free photos to show buildings' facades to best advantage.



His next-favorite time was dusk. Some of his photos show capitols with their interior lights shining while the sky darkens in the background.

Alaska and Hawaii were the final capitols on his list. He and his wife, Joan, stopped at Juneau, Alaska, during a cruise. They made it to Honolulu, Hawaii's capital, during a vacation in January 2010.



Thomas Jefferson designed the state capitol in Richmond, Va., and his spirit seems to remain in the building, Jim Stembridge said. The state built an addition tucked into the hill so as not to mar the building's lines.
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You can press Stembridge, but he's reluctant to name favorites from among the 50 capitols he has so passionately pursued.

"I liked about 30 or 35," he said. "I like different ones for different reasons."

Among them: the Virginia Capitol, which was designed by Thomas Jefferson.

"Thomas Jefferson's

spirit is in that building. You go past the porch he designed," he said.

The capitol in Salt Lake City, Utah, got Stenbridge's nod for its recent renovations (he made a second trip to photograph the final product).

"They did a wonderful job," he said. "The glass is bright and sunlight falls in; it lights the details magnificently."

Oregon's Capitol makes the top-30 list, although Stenbridge's reasons are more personal than architectural: "There are many things about the Oregon Capitol that I love," he said. "The chambers echo with debates of legislation past and present. It's a very emotional thing for me."

Stenbridge will sign books on June 6 at the Capitol. He's been invited to do the same in South Dakota and Missouri.

He's hoping that many states will stock the book in their gift shops. With two pages per capitol, it makes a great souvenir across the country, he said.

He also hopes to inspire readers to start their own pilgrimages to the nation's many and varied monuments to democracy.

"It's a wonderful way to learn about the history of our country," he said. "You feel good about where we live, knowing your citizenship counts for something."

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Stenbridge raised hackles in Concord, N.H., by referring to the top structure as more of a cupola than a dome. "We don't have a cupola, we have a dome," stiffed a staffer.
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