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# OUTDOORS

## Peterburs was planted on his convictions

*"If a single man plants himself on his convictions and then abides, the huge world will come round to him."*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

It's doubtful that Thiensville's William Peterburs ever considered himself a crusader. More importantly, he embodied truth, courage and principle.

From late 1968 to 1986, Peterburs endured arrogant scorn and ignorant jeers as he spread the word about the evils of lead shot. He had a fascinating ability to mix numbers and words so clearly that everyone could understand his reasoning.

Like other great leaders, Peterburs was driven by his own curiosity. His campaign against lead shot began in a marsh on



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COMMENTARY

Nov. 30, 1968. He had shot an emaciated goose, and he set out to find what caused its condition.

He eventually learned it was lead poisoning. The goose had picked up lead pellets off the lake bottom and ingested them. As the lead broke down in the goose's gizzard, the poison entered its bloodstream. The toxin was slowly killing the goose before Peterburs ended its agony.

Peterburs won many plaudits

for his fight against lead shot, including the Eagle Award in 1977 from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. That same year, he received a conservation award from the National Wildlife Federation.

By 1986, thanks in large part to Peterburs, Wisconsin banned the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting. Within the next few years, the ban was nationwide. The country had come round to Bill Peterburs.

Ironically, 27 years to the date of shooting that poisoned goose, Peterburs died of cancer at age 74.

During his last few years, Peterburs took up another unpopular cause: He fought the law that allows ducks to be shot

beginning 30 minutes before sunrise. That made him a heretic in some circles, but he probably took solace in the fact that visionaries like Aldo Leopold had held the same view.

After learning of Peterburs' death, I rummaged through some files to reread notes from my few interviews with him. The rest of this space is devoted to Peterburs' words, which we'll never again be blessed to hear:

■ "We have no more right to poison birds with lead shot than we have to poison our kids with lead paint."

■ "When we see a flag waving up there, it should catch our attention, even if we don't know what it means. With the vagaries of nature, some things we'll never

comprehend. But we can't afford to ignore things just because we don't understand."

■ "Shooting ducks a half-hour before sunrise creates an intolerable waste in a time of famine. It promotes behavior that's contrary to everything we try to teach our hunters. We tell them to be sure of their target, yet we let them shoot at a time when identification is difficult."

■ "The only credible reason for that law is to make it easier to fill a bag limit, because ducks are most active then. But that means we're measuring our success by the weight of our game bag. If that's all you want, buy the damn things."

■ "I don't think it will take as long to repeal the early shooting laws. Already people are talking

about a compromise, of going to 15 minutes before sunrise. They recognize it's a problem. If it's not a problem, then why go to that? When they talk compromise, I know I have them."

■ "The biologists tell me I'm right on target, but it's the same old politics of greed in waterfowl management. I don't like to see waterfowlers tearing at each other's throats. I want open dialogue with them. I have faith Wisconsin's hunters will do the right thing if you provide them with facts."

Peterburs left before he could finish that fight.

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