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Former Bristol Central teacher shares survival tips, love of nature in new book

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Jul 14, 2025



Author and former Bristol Central High school teacher Kevin Estela will hold a signing for his new book “Beyond the Field: Taking Wilderness Skills to the Next Level”.
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BRISTOL – Survival expert Kevin Estela is coming home to the place his love of nature was formed to share more lessons on wilderness survival in his new book.

Estela, a former Bristol Central High School history teacher and longtime friend of the Harry C. Barnes Memorial Nature Center, will host a signing event for his latest book, “Beyond the Field: Taking Wilderness Skills to the Next Level”, on July 19.

The event, which includes a meet-and-greet, will run from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Barnes Nature Center at 175 Shrub Rd.

Estela’s newest work builds on the foundation of his first book, “101 Skills You Need to Survive in the Woods”, and is described as a guide to mastering advanced wilderness skills by the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut.

“[The first book] has been a good seller here at the Barnes Nature Center,” said Fern Vaughn, program coordinator at the center. “We are happy to know him; he’s a great person to have on our side.”

From navigating winter camping to refining marksmanship and cultivating a survival mindset, his new book provides more than 200 tips to help readers not just survive but thrive outdoors.

“Nature is going to be nature,” he said. “It doesn’t matter what your day has been like. There are certain universal things that exist in nature. By understanding them, you come to understand more about the world. There is always something more to learn outdoors.”

Now living in North Carolina, Estela said he still makes a point to visit Bristol during the holidays and when traveling to Kent for hunting. Each trip, he stops by the Barnes Nature Center — “where it all began.”

His roots with the organization run deep. Estela is a trustee with the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut, has taught outdoor survival programs for their summer camp, and

created a permanent endowment through the Main Street Community Foundation that funds scholarships to the camp so the next generation of explorers has a chance to connect with nature.

“I first went hiking at the Barnes Nature Center when I was five years old with my dad,” Estela said.

Estela said his passion for survivalism was shaped by the stories his father shared when he was growing up. As a child in the Philippines during World War II, Estela’s father survived in the jungle while hiding from the Japanese Imperial Army.

“Picture going to sleep every night and instead of the typical stories parents tell their children, my father would tell me about how he would bend coat hangers into barbs for fishing,” Estela said. “He was like a real life Robinson Crusoe or MacGyver.”

That early inspiration led Estela to travel the globe in search of wilderness experiences — from the fjords of Scandinavia to the savannahs of South Africa. His future plans include camping under the northern lights in Finland, visiting Antarctica, and retracing his father’s steps through the jungles of the Philippines — an experience he plans to chronicle in a third book.

Estela said that while “101 Skills You Need to Survive in the Woods” laid out the basics of outdoor survival, “Beyond the Field” dives deeper.

“The main idea is teaching the teacher,” Estela said. “In the final chapter I say if you think you know a lot about survivalism, try to teach someone else.”

Estela dedicated his first book to his father, Dr. Jose Estela, a longtime physician in Bristol whom he calls his “greatest inspiration.” He also honored Marty Simpson of the Wilderness Learning Center and Pamana Tuhon Christopher Sayne Sr., a martial arts mentor.

His new book is dedicated to the memory of his late mother, Darlene Estela, who passed away in 2022 after a battle with cancer. Estela said his 86-year-old father may join him at the upcoming event.

Estela held a signing at Barnes for his first book as well, which he said drew a large and supportive crowd — including many of his former students.

“A lot of the photos in that book were taken at the Barnes Nature Center,” he said.

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