

# Arts/Theatre

## Leslie McGuirk serves up playful pups, good manners

BY L.L. ANGEL  
COLUMNIST

Leslie McGuirk, the Vero Beach author, illustrator and designer, has done it again. The creator of a hit series of children's books about Tucker the terrier, McGuirk, along with co-author Alex von Bidder, an owner of The Four Seasons Restaurant in New York, will be at the Vero Beach Book Center next week, signing their newest book, *Wiggens Learns His Manners* at The Four Seasons Restaurant.

According to McGuirk, the evening is really more for adults than children. "It's wonderful that Alex is flying down from New York because his manners are so exquisite. It's really an opportunity to talk about manners and why they're so important," she says.

Von Bidder is also co-author of *The Four Seasons: A History of America's Premier Restaurant* and a columnist for *Best Life* magazine. So he knows a thing or two about manners.

McGuirk puts it this way: "If you teach your child good manners, especially in the form of kindness and compassion, your child will have a better life."

Since its publication in New York in mid-August, the book has received rave reviews. Certainly all the right people were at September's launch party for the book at The Four Seasons. There was Dick Parsons, former head of AOLTime Warner, now head of Citigroup, Pamela Fiori, editor in chief of *Town & Country*, and Michael Ovitz, the former head of Disney to name just a few.

In fact, Fiori was so impressed with the book's whimsical illustrations, that McGuirk says she invited the author/

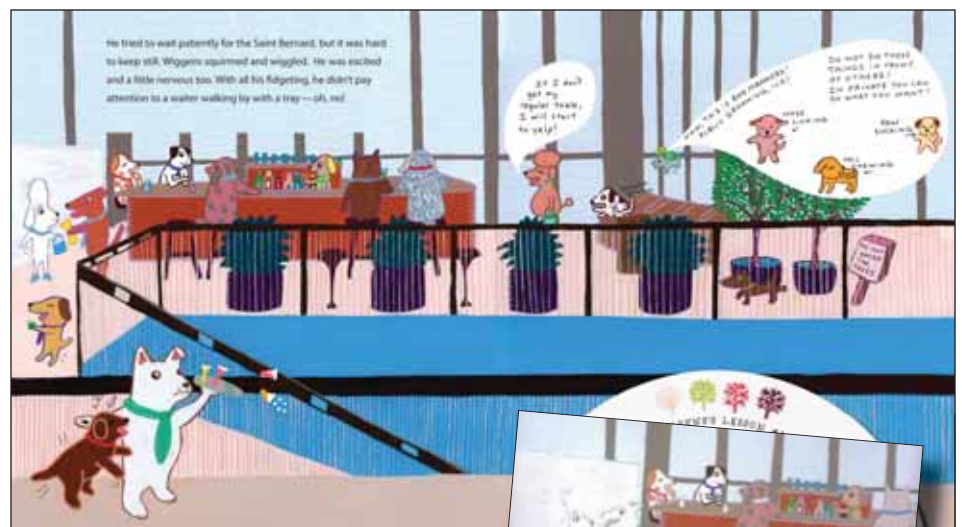


Author/illustrator Leslie McGuirk with co-author Alex Von Bidder at signing for *Wiggens Learns His Manners* at the Four Seasons Restaurant

illustrator to create some artwork for the magazine. It also featured *Wiggens Learns His Manners* in its July 2009 issue.

Judging from the stellar reviews on the back of the handsome book, members of New York's power elite agree.

From entrepreneur Martha Stewart: "This enchanting book serves up delightful illustrations with a generous dollop of humor to teach important



It takes a lot of detailed work and layering to create the finished illustration

An unfinished illustration, interior of The Four Seasons Restaurant—Wiggens bumps into waiter.

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lessons to youngsters...”

Best-selling author, Mary Higgins Clark, says, “I’m so glad Wiggins found the perfect place to learn that kindness and manners will open every imaginable door to a happy life for him.”

Wiggins is a rascally, rowdy Chocolate Labrador puppy whose manners are simply atrocious. His parents are at their wits’ ends when lo and behold, they learn of a special etiquette class at the world-renowned Four Seasons Restaurant. With the help of a Saint Bernard, he and the three other puppies learn ten important lessons and enjoy some delectable food too.

McGuirk, who has been ensconced with her three dogs at Summer Place in a charming artist’s bungalow since May 2000, has written and illustrated a slew of well-received children’s books and had remarkable success with them, as well as with her design work. Some years ago, McGuirk designed over 800 products for the Japanese design company and retailer Takashimaya.

Her popular children’s series featuring Tucker the terrier includes Lucky Tucker, Tucker’s Spooky Halloween, and Ho, Ho, Ho Tucker!

A native of Bronxville, New York and a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, McGuirk moved here from Maine to escape the winters and to be near her mother in Hobe Sound. McGuirk fell in love with the laid-back beach style of Summer Place, on the north island.

“We don’t mow lawns in Summer Place,” says McGuirk. “It’s like living in a jungle with sandy roads. It’s an enclave of people who love nature and the beach.”

McGuirk has just finished her 14<sup>th</sup> book and has several more in the works. She is also creative director for the Alexis Agency, an advertising/PR agency specializing in luxury products and services. She also teaches a number of creativity workshops.

That’s how she met von Bidder. McGuirk was teaching a workshop at the Rancho la Puerta spa in Baja, Mexico more than six years ago and von Bidder was there with his family. He took her workshop and the two realized they were kindred spirits.

“I found his spirit to be very similar to mine — playful, yet wise,” she says. “Later, when a friend suggested I do a book on manners, I immediately thought of Alex.”

Fortunately, von Bidder loved McGuirk’s idea of an ill-behaved puppy learning his manners at The Four Seasons and the two of them began working together in earnest. McGuirk made many trips to New York absorbing the extraordinary ambience of The Four Seasons.

Designed by Phillip Johnson and Mies Van der Rohe in 1959, it is the power-lunch place of Manhattan.

McGuirk says it may be the most famous restaurant in the world. Von Bidder told her Jackie Onassis called it the most intimidating and elegant restaurant she’d ever been in. “When you walk up the stairs, to enter, said Jackie, it’s like entering a cathedral.”

“When I would go there to draw it, I would have panic attacks,” says McGuirk. “Trying to capture the ambience of this place with its Picassos and its pool in the dining room had me

acing the floor at night.”

Back home, she worked from photos; she and von Bidder phoned, emailed and worked together for a solid week at the Rancho Puerta spa in Mexico.

They agreed that the book needed four characteristics: to be a great, funny story for kids, to playfully teach manners, to include humor for adults, and to present life lessons for adults as well as children.

Ten lessons are served up on Four Seasons signature plates, emphasizing courtesy, respect, kindness, pa-

tience, restraint, and the importance of expressing gratitude.

McGuirk’s charming narrative is accompanied by her playful gouache illustrations, depicting whimsical dogs in vibrant watercolors. Her talking dogs nimbly cavort across the pages — poodles in blue heels with matching handbags, pups doing their morning yoga poses, even guardian angel dogs whispering encouragements to the three lab pups.

McGuirk and Von Bidder will be signing their book at Vero Beach Book Center at 4 pm Saturday, Nov. 7.

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