

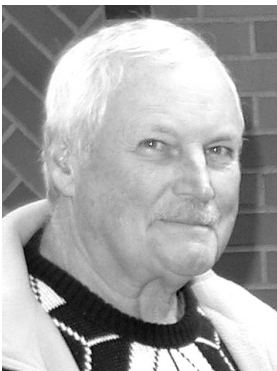
Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



Belanger joins Hall

THE LABOR Hall of Fame's newest honoree is Bill Belanger, 64, a retired apprenticeship coordinator for Portland-based Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1, which represents skilled workers in the brick, tile, terrazzo, marble and restoration industry in Oregon and Southwest Washington.



BILL BELANGER

He was selected for the honor by the Northwest Oregon Labor Retirees Council, the sponsor of the Hall of Fame. The NOLRC is affiliated with the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO, which is headquartered in the Scandia Building at 1125 SE Madison St., Portland.

Belanger retired in 2001 after a 35-year career in the bricklaying trade.

WILLIAM PAUL BELANGER was born in Portland on March 3, 1942. He attended Lake Grove Grade School in suburban Clackamas County and graduated from Lake Oswego High School, where he was a cross country runner on the track team. He attended Portland State for a year. Later on, he spent six years in the Oregon Air National Guard as an electronics technician.

His active duty was served at an Air Force base near San Antonio, Texas.

Belanger said he worked at "a variety of jobs" until contractor Bob Schroeder hired him in 1966 to start as an apprentice bricklayer on a project in Seaside on the Oregon Coast. He earned journeyman status in three and a half years. Another journeyman, Jim McNannay, and Bill became friends; Jim encouraged Bill to attend union meetings and become an actively participating member. McNannay later was elected as the union's business manager and after retiring in 1994 he was selected for the Labor Hall of Fame.

BILL'S FIRST elected office in Local 1 was sergeant-at-arms. Next came the office of president, presiding at union meetings. He later was elected as recording secretary and he also became a business agent. As recording secretary, he compiled the official minutes of the union's meetings. Back then, Bricklayers Local 1 had its office in the Mason Trades Building at 2215 SE Division St. Other unions in the mason trades, also called the trowel trades because they use that tool, included Cement Masons Local 555, Plasterers Local 82 and Lathers Local 54. The Lathers later merged into the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. Other unions, not in the mason trades, also had offices in the building. Now, the Mason Trades Building, including a state-of-the-art apprenticeship center, is at 12812 NE Marx St.; the unions sold the building on SE Division.

BELANGER SPENT a year, 1985-86, as the elected secretary-treasurer of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council. He said because the job did not pay a full-time salary he worked part-time as a bricklayer and after a year left the council to work full-time at his trade. He still held the recording secretary post in Local 1. When John Mohlis succeeded McNannay as Local 1's business manager in 1994, he asked Belanger to become the union's apprenticeship coordinator.

LOCAL 1 MEMBERS perform civic volunteer work for organizations in the geographic areas of the union's jurisdiction. Belanger helped build dugouts for high school baseball teams and he also helped build a brick retaining wall for a home for battered women and their children.

Bill Belanger and his wife, Sharon Rixen, have lived on a houseboat for three decades. Their home is moored in North Portland in a harbor connecting to the Columbia River. They enjoy living on the water and own a 38-foot boat, a single-engine fiberglass trawler.

Their boat, berthed at Astoria, is named "Break Time" as a reminder of an on-board accident when Sharon slipped on a throw rug and broke an ankle.

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...The great **TAX SHIFT**

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In 1973, corporations paid 18.5 percent of the income taxes paid in Oregon. Today they pay less than 5 percent. The Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCPP), a labor-allied economic think tank, estimates that if corporate income taxpayers still paid the same share they paid in the 1970s, the state would have \$900 million a year more to spend on schools, public safety and low-income senior citizens.

Today, Oregon tax law contains 49 income tax breaks for corporations. More than half of those were added in the last decade.

"No matter how you look at it, corporate taxes are way down," says OCPP researcher Mike Leachman.

In fact, two-thirds of Oregon corporations pay just \$10 a year in income tax. That's because Oregon's corporate income tax applies only to profits, and if a company can show that its expenses exceeded revenues, it pays only a minimum tax of \$10, even though it may have hundreds of millions of dollars in income. The State of Washington, on the other hand, taxes corporations based on gross receipts. If Oregon did that, there would be no shortage of funds to pay for the government services the public wants.

In Oregon, even when companies are profitable, they don't necessarily pay taxes. One fifth of the corporations paying just \$10 a year are profitable, but the tax law allows them to "carry forward" losses from previous years.

And today, more companies are

structured as "S corporations" or Limited Liability Corporations, meaning that their profits are taxed as personal income.

Even before getting to deductions and credits that reduce the corporate tax bill, the income tax rate itself is unequal. Oregon taxes corporate income at 6.6 percent, while most personal income is taxed at 9 percent. That difference prompted former Oregon AFL-CIO president Tim Nesbitt to call for corporations to pay the same rate as their employees — but the Legislature has so far been deaf to that proposal.

On the contrary, every two years, the people's representatives meet in Salem to discuss new ways to cut corporate taxes. For the benefit of companies like Nike and Intel, recent legislatures moved to a different way to calculate corporate income, lowering the taxes on those that have sales primarily out of state, and increasing the taxes on those that sell in Oregon.

Overall, the change is costing the state about \$36 million a year.

Another tax break to subsidize corporate research and development was expanded last year. That's expected to cost \$11 million a year, and most of the break will go to one company.

If it wasn't for efforts in the Senate, the 2005 Legislature might have dug an even bigger budget hole. The Senate rejected nearly a dozen proposed tax breaks passed by the House that would have cost the state treasury nearly \$290 million, according to an estimate by the union-supported tax fairness group Our Oregon. On its

Web site — ouregon.org — the group's legislative report identifies each of those giveaways, and how lawmakers voted.

But tax breaks come in many forms. And besides the income tax, Oregon corporations also pay less in property taxes than they used to. Partly that's because of property tax limitation measures that apply to residential property too. Assessments on commercial and industrial properties haven't been going up as fast. It's also the case that the shift to a service economy has lowered the share of property taxes paid by business: Oregon used to have wood products companies, for example, that owned expensive equipment that they paid property tax on. Now Oregon has more service sector companies, which don't pay much property taxes.

Tax avoidance is also on the rise, OCPP's Leachman says, with companies sheltering money overseas, or shifting how they account revenue from one state to another to take advantage of differences in tax treatment.

All told, these changes amount to a shift of the tax burden onto households. That shift, Nesbitt and others say, is partly responsible for voters' reluctance to support new taxes: They already feel like they're paying more for less. And they are — because corporations are paying less for more. If Oregonians want good schools, safe streets, and help for the poor and elderly, voters may have to turn back the clock to a time when business paid a bigger share.

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