

From Oregon State Building Trades Council

Construction union icon Shiprack retires after 25 years

Bob Shiprack, an icon of Oregon construction unions, retired Oct. 1 as executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council.

Shiprack's career started in 1974 as an apprentice in International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48. His introduction to organized labor, however came much sooner than that as his father, Ray, was business manager of Cement Masons Local 555 and later an international rep.

"I grew up in the construction industry," said Shiprack, who worked on concrete crews as a member of the Laborers Union while in college.

Shiprack, 60, graduated from Marshall High School in Southeast Portland and played offensive tackle for the Portland State Vikings football team under Coach Don Read. He graduated with a bachelors degree in social sciences.

With diploma in hand, Shiprack returned to concrete work. "I could make more money in construction than I could in any job related to college," he said.

Throughout his school years, Shiprack would volunteer with his father on political projects sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO. It was while volunteering that Shiprack met Lloyd Knutson, a member of IBEW Local 48 and then political coordinator for the Oregon AFL-CIO. Shiprack told Knutson of his interest in becoming an electrician. He had taken four years of electronics in high school and he enjoyed the construction trades. Knutson steered him to the electricians apprenticeship program. Shiprack aced the aptitude test and before he knew it was registered in the apprenticeship training program.

Shiprack was involved with the union from the outset. While still an apprentice, then-Local 48 Business Manager Art Bauder recognized his leader-



Bob Shiprack (left) clowns around with his successor John Mohlis at his last building trades meeting. Shiprack retired Oct. 1 after 25 years as executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council.

ship qualities and asked him to serve on a health care committee as a representative of the younger members of the local. Later, while still an apprentice, Shiprack was appointed to a committee that became the founding members of the local's political action committee (PAC). Additionally, Shiprack was sent to the OSBCTC convention as a delegate, and at his first convention he was elected conductor — a first for an apprentice.

Shiprack recalled a major rift at his local over the issue of covering pregnancies in health insurance plans. His first child was born in 1978, and at that time, health insurance didn't cover pregnancy. "It was the older guys vs. the younger guys," Shiprack recollected. "Thank goodness, Congress changed the law requiring coverage."

Shiprack logged steady hours doing residential work until the 1981-82 re-

cession. "I was out of work for a full year," he said.

It was about that time that he was recruited by IBEW union brother Glenn Otto, a Democratic state representative from Troutdale, to run for the Oregon House of Representatives in the freshly-redistricted District 23 in Clackamas County (Beavercreek).

Shiprack was intrigued. He ran and was elected to the seat in 1982.

He served six terms — three as chair of the House Labor Committee, and

later as a member of the powerful Ways and Means Committee, where he got a valuable education in the budget process and resources.

With the recession lingering, the state building trades council found itself in tough financial straits. It was 1984, and Bill Belanger of Bricklayers Local 1 had succeeded longtime leader Bob Stanfill, who retired. Shiprack had come into the union office as president at the same time Belanger was elected. But less than two years later the council couldn't afford to keep a full-time leader. Belanger returned to his trade and Shiprack agreed to handle the day-to-day business of the organization until the next election in 1987.

"I had some pay coming from the Legislature, so I was able to do the job for stipends," Shiprack said.

The economy eventually turned around, and the Building Trades — under Shiprack's leadership — became a powerful political force in Oregon.

As a lawmaker and union leader, Shiprack influenced countless bills and project labor agreements that bettered the lives of construction workers. Along the way he also established a reputation as a man who, despite his football player physique, would use brains over brawn to get the job done.

He says he is most proud of bills he helped craft that allow apprentices to collect unemployment insurance while going to school (1987 session); draw clearer direction for state agencies when determining independent contractor sta-

tus (1987 session); reforming the workers' compensation system (1990 session); require paying the highest prevailing wage on public projects that mix state and federal dollars (2005 session); and require prevailing wage laws on public-private projects (2007 session).

Throughout his career, Shiprack has served on numerous governor-appointed advisory committees involving employment, health and safety, and revenue. He will retain his seat on the Energy Facility Siting Council for another year, but left as co-chair of the Workers Compensation Management-Labor Advisory Committee this month.

In reflection on his career, Shiprack said the building trades has improved its numbers, "because we became smarter. We are more progressive in our relationships with contractors, business leaders and politicians. More than anything else is the quality of today's work, which is based on the excellent training of union apprenticeship programs and an ingrained work ethic."

Shiprack said he likely will do some consulting work in retirement, primarily on clean energy and solar. He said he has no plans to run for elected office or to lobby.

Shiprack is married to Judy (Bauman), a former state legislator who now serves on the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners. He has three adult children from a previous marriage. Ben is an apprentice electrician, Julie is a registered nurse, and Jennifer works in public relations.



James Coon



Raymond Thomas



Cynthia Newton



Kimberly Tucker



Chris Frost

The team at **SWANSON, THOMAS & COON** can help you:

Know Your Rights
If your employer forces you to work in dangerous work conditions you can make a **CONFIDENTIAL** report to OSHA by calling (800) 922-2689.

Workers Compensation
Construction Injuries
Death Claims
Personal Injury/Product Liability
Social Security Disability
Occupational Disease/Mesothelioma

Call us today at **503-228-5222**
Straight answers. No cost for consultation.



SWANSON, THOMAS & COON ATTORNEYS AT LAW
820 S.W. Second Avenue, Suite 200
Portland, Oregon 97204
www.stc-law.com



**Quest
Investment
Management, Inc.**

**Serving Multi-Employer
Trusts for 25 Years**

Cam Johnson
Patrick Worley
Doug Goebel

Greg Sherwood
Monte Johnson
Adrian Hamilton

One SW Columbia St., Suite 1100 Portland, OR 97258
503-221-0158

www.QuestInvestment.com