

The West Coast Shoe Company Story

Family owned business in Scappoose celebrates a century of building quality handcrafted boots and shoes

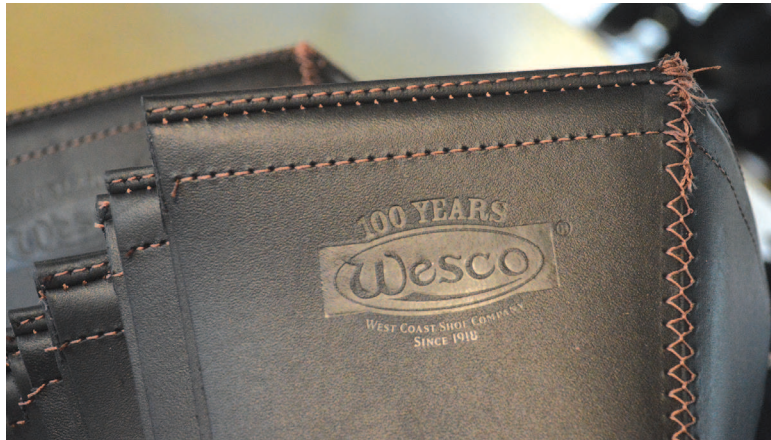
By Scott Laird

The West Coast Shoe Company has been distinctly tied to the Pacific Northwest and the logging industry for 100 years. Many Columbia County residents may be unaware that one of the world's top manufacturers of handcrafted, American made, custom work boots is located right here in Scappoose. This family owned business has quietly become a legend in the work boot industry, while more recently building a loyal following among lovers of high quality fashion footwear.

The West Coast Shoe Company, also known as Wesco, has been commemorating their 100 year anniversary during 2018 with billboards along Highway 30. They ended the year with an open house celebration at their world headquarters in Scappoose on December 5-6, inviting longtime customers, distributors, and others from around the world to join them for the festivities.

The West Coast Shoe Company's story is a unique one, especially in this age of automated manufacturing by large corporations. Originally started

by John Henry Shoemaker (a very fitting name) in Portland, Oregon in 1918, Wesco has remained a family owned and family run business for all of its 100 years. Four of the five company Presidents have been named Shoemaker, including current President Roberta Shoemaker, the granddaughter of John Henry, who currently owns the company with



two of her sisters.

"Growing up I remember coming in here with my cousins to visit the factory," says Roberta Shoemaker about her family's long history with Wesco. "Our aunts and uncles, and in my case both my paternal and maternal grandfathers, all were working here. That's how it started and that's how it's been for decades. It just makes sense that that's how it's needed to continue."

The origins of the company are a well documented legend within the family - it's a story of determination and achievement the owners and employees can reflect on with pride. 16 year old

John Henry Shoemaker started his shoemaking career in Grand Rapids, Michigan, then considered the logging capital of the world. He first worked at Rindgen, Kalmbach, Logie & Co., where he learned the craft of building logging boots. The son of European immigrants, John Henry left a young family in 1903 and headed for the Pacific Northwest to look for new opportunities, hoping to establish himself and send for his wife Lou Ella and infant daughter. Intending to head for Seattle, Shoemaker's money ran out in Portland. There he was fortunate to land a job

with the Bradley Shoe Company where his boot crafting skills were in demand; he sent for his family, and later moved to the Goodyear Shoe Company.

In 1918, now with a family of seven, John Henry Shoemaker set out on his own and established the West Coast Shoe Company. Work boots were the focus, and with the logging industry in Oregon quickly expanding, so did his business. John Henry moved his storefront and factory four times around Portland between 1918 and 1929 to meet the growing demand for his boots.

"When West Coast Shoe Company started one hundred percent of our



Calk boots for loggers were Wesco's original boot - they continue to make them today.

business was logging driven and it's been an integral part from the beginning, and for our growth through the many decades of our history," says Roberta Shoemaker. "My grandfather carried the knowledge he gained in Michigan making logging boots out West with him. With logging being a large part of the Pacific Northwest and boots being a safety feature that the workers had to have as part of their tools, logging played a big part of our history for a long time."

Old photos of the various storefronts in Portland's downtown show that Wesco not only sold and repaired their own shoes and boots, but also supplied loggers and other workers with their

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VHS Winter Sports Preview

Wrestling - After winning the Special District 1 Meet last year in dominating fashion and sending six wrestlers to the State Tournament, Head coach Chris Barnes (last season's District Coach of the Year) and the Logger wrestlers look poised for a similar season this year.

The Logger's lineup looks

stacked once again with over 20 wrestlers out for the team, four of them returning state qualifiers.

"I feel really good about this season," says Barnes. "I'm confident we're going to be strong again this year."

The road to the District Title will be a bit tougher this year, as five teams have been added, including Sheridan, known for having a strong program in the past.

"I don't see why we can't repeat," says Barnes. "I think we're as talented, if not better, than last year. We don't have the same leadership yet, but that's coming."

Barnes says the team looks strong through the lower weights, with at least two wrestlers in most weight categories, but the team is short in the higher weight classes.

The team opened their season with a good showing on November 30 at the Harrisburg Tournament, finishing 5th out of 20 teams that were mostly 4, 5, and 6A. Sophomore Patrick Fletcher was the only individual winner at 106 pounds, while freshman Brandon Depue and Josh Rice both took 2nd.

Rice will be one of the team leaders this season. The defending



Above: Head coach Chris Barnes gives instruction to his wrestlers. The Loggers are looking to defend their District Championship this season.

Below: Josh Sholes (front in blue) is one of four returning wrestlers who qualified for the State Meet last year.



District Champ is a junior who took 3rd place at the State Tournament last year. Rice will probably wrestle at 152.

Other wrestlers to watch for are seniors Hepner Forester at 160 and Josh Sholes at 126 who both also qualified for state last year. Sophomore Wyatt Jones went to state at 106 last year, but has grown and will most likely wrestle at 126.

Returning wrestlers to keep an eye on include seniors Byron Cook at 138 and Isaiah Bozied at 145, and juniors Austin Sicard at 138 or 145, and James Watson at 182.

Newcomers to the program include freshman Luke Thompson at 126 who was a standout during his middle school career, and senior Matt Lavoi at 120, a transfer student from St. Helens who has seven years of wrestling experience and qualified for state last year. Keep an eye on sophomore Pete Crystal, a first year wrestler who is strong and athletic.

Barnes has been working to develop the girls program and this year he has four girls on the squad. The girls have a separate schedule of meets this year, and most meets are now providing a girls bracket, but the girls can also wrestle in the regular meet bracket if

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