

# Changing hands

## After 35 years, Mestriches hand off Clatsop Power Equipment

Story & Photo by Edward Stratton  
Coast River Business Journal  
estratton@crbizjournal.com

Fred Mestrich spent more than 18 years teaching youths about small engine repair at a vocational campus on Youngs River Road outside Astoria before a round of layoffs had him looking for a new line of work.

He and his wife, Ann Mestrich, who worked as a bank teller, looked down the street at a former wrecking yard and feed store. In 1986, they opened Clatsop Power Equipment, repairing and selling the area's home machinery. Over the next 35 years, the store became a preferred local dealer for brands like John Deere and Snapper.

The Mestriches retired this month, passing the store and their staff off to the owners of Clark County Lawn and Tractor in Vancouver, Washington.

"We were ready for retirement, and John Deere wouldn't let us just sell on the open market," Fred Mestrich said. "We had to sell to another John Deere dealer. We couldn't even turn it over to our sons."

The Mestriches connected with the owners of the Vancouver store, whose general manager Kevin Williquette said they were looking to expand beyond the one location. They are renaming the Astoria location Clatsop County Lawn and Tractor but keeping the same staff and a similar operation.

"The opportunities for us to expand are pretty minimal, as the bigger corporations are buying up a lot of these dealerships," Williquette said.

Prior to the sale, the owners had wanted to add

another location in Clark County, Williquette said, but John Deere wanted them to go a different direction. The timing worked out with the retirement of the Mestriches, who needed a buyer John Deere would sign off on.

Running a business wasn't completely new to the Mestriches, whose family had run Chris' News on 14th and Commercial streets in Astoria. Their two sons, Bryan and Gregg Mestrich, worked for Clatsop Power Equipment since they were teenagers.

Bryan Mestrich will stay on with Clatsop County Lawn and Tractor. Fred Mestrich said he would fill in from time to time as needed and that he is also helping Gregg Mestrich start a company to take on the store's former boat motor repair business.

Aside from teaching and running a business, Fred Mestrich retired from Lewis and Clark Fire & Rescue in 2012 after 36 years of service. He still serves on the fire district's board. A member of the Lower Columbia Classics Auto Club, he is most looking forward to having more time to work on his cars.

"Right now I'm doing a '56 Chevy two-door station wagon," he said. "The next one's going to be a '56 four-door hardtop. And I've got a few Model As. (Ann) has got a '63 (Mercury) Comet convertible."

Asked about her plans, Ann Mestrich said she'd miss all the customers from over the years but has a long list of home projects and books to finish now that the couple isn't spending six days a week running the business.

"Nice days, they'll probably see us out driving a car," she said.



Fred and Ann Mestrich ended their 35-year run as owners of Clatsop Power Equipment this month, selling the store to the owners of Clark County Lawn and Tractor in Vancouver, Washington.

# Coast River BUSINESS JOURNAL

Interested in learning more from local business events? We'd like to hear from you about the type of events you'd like to see Coast River Business Journal bring to our readers.

Please fill out the survey below and return to:  
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Or fill out the survey online at:  
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### **Coast River Business Journal Events Survey**

#### **1. What's your age range?**

- Under 20
- 20 to 50
- over 50

#### **2. What event style would you prefer?**

- Panel discussion with multiple speakers
- Journalist interviews speaker
- Speaker series with one speaker per event
- Fundraiser/membership drive
- Speaker presentation followed by games to win prizes
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **3. What topics are you most interested in hearing about?**

*(choose all that apply)*

- Real estate
- Economic outlook panel
- Entrepreneurship, or something like a "How I Built This" episode
- Outdoor recreation
- Tourism industry
- Financial literacy
- Diversity in business
- Women in business
- Forestry
- Fisheries
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **4. Who would you like to hear from? Give examples of people, businesses, organizations or other ideas.**

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#### **5. What would make you the most interested in attending an event?**

*(answer all that apply)*

- Relevant topic
- Prominent speaker
- Games and/or chances to win prizes
- Dinner
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **6. Is there anything else you'd like us to know while planning these events?**

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