

Honor: 'He was a tough nut'

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Chief, the old Astoria-based salvage ship involved in some of the most memorable operations on the West Coast, including the Exxon Valdez that ran aground and gushed oil into Prince William Sound off Alaska in 1989.

Timed for the same weekend as the annual FisherPoets Gathering, the reunion gave the former crew — known as “chieftains” — and their family and friends a chance to swap stories, drink a few

beers, gently roast Morris, and drink a few more.

Wesley “Geno” Leech, a fisherman in Chinook, Wash., who worked on the Salvage Chief and is a celebrated fisherpoet, read a poem that describes the powerful ship as “a steel saint, with a Fairbanks beating heart.”

(The Salvage Chief, now moored at Swan Island in Portland, had Fairbanks-Morse engines. The 203-foot vessel was built as a military landing ship but converted for private salvage operations in 1949).

Riutta, who grew up in Astoria and now lives in Redmond, Wash., said he has always looked up to the Salvage Chief as a “symbol of seamanship and skill as a mariner, literally in the world.”

On a brawny tug known for strong men, Morris stood out as an imposing figure. His nickname — or at least one them — was “Nasty.”

“He was a tough nut,” said Don Floyd, who worked on the Salvage Chief and lives

in Svensen. “He didn’t know what pain was.”

Floyd and others who organized the tribute to Morris sought to keep it quiet beforehand because they feared Morris might not show up if he knew he was being honored.

Now 86, Morris, who lives in Astoria, politely thanked the Coast Guard brass and his fellow chieftains.

“If I knew all of this was going to go on, I’d have probably kept on running when I went by here,” he said afterward with a laugh.



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Mike Phillips, the commander of the American Legion post, presents Albert Morris with a replica of the legion’s Gold Medal of Valor during a tribute at the Clatsop Post 12 American Legion. Morris received the Medal from Baltimore Post in 1949.

People gather in the Astoria Event Center to listen to a story circle hosted by Jay Speakman Saturday.

JOSHUA BESSEX
The Daily Astorian



FisherPoets: Several of the poets at the event came out of Clatsop County

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“And, not surprising, I’m studying work passion and ‘workaholicism,’” said Pickett. “So, you can take the girl out of the fishing, but I don’t think you can take the fishing out of the girl.”

Several FisherPoets came out of Clatsop County, including Broderick, his son Max, Speakman and Seaside resident Austin Tomlinson. Astoria turned out Nancy Cook, a writing instructor at Clatsop Community College and formerly a fisheries observer and a roe technician on the Bering Sea; folklorist, historian, songwriter and Salmon for All member Hobe Kytr; and Dave Densmore, a lifetime commercial fisher from Alaska.

So long

Each FisherPoet took the stage Sunday to say goodbye in their own way, whether it be a poem, a song or thank you to the audiences.

Pickett shared some choice

radio dispatches by fisherman on the water during her time in Alaska. Ron McDaniel, the cowboy from northwest Arkansas, shared a poem about the fearful experience of a prostate exam. Lloyd Montgomery from Wasila, Alaska, ended his performances at FisherPoets with a monologued, multi-act play about hunting caribou and whale, playing parts as both a Native Alaskan playing drums and a tusk, and an aborigine playing a didgeridoo.

“Whenever I decide to leave, I’ll be the one who has the say, not some jumped-up Johnny-come-lately that may think I’m in his way,” said Densmore in “Old Sea Story,” his closing poem for FisherPoets. “And remember before you show disrespect to someone with more years than you, that same spot in the trail is waiting there for you.”

Hand-in-hand with the spoken word art and hands-on workshops of FisherPoets was advocacy for the environment, and by extension commercial fishing, with presentations on ocean

acidification and potential and current threats to the health of the Columbia River.

At the Columbian Theater, in the documentary “The Breach,” filmmaker Mark Titus explored the effects of pollution, salmon hatcheries and a the proposed Pebble copper mine on wild runs from Johnson Creek, Portland, to Bristol Bay, Alaska. “In the Same Boat,” by Alaska gillnetter Elijah Lawson, promoted the sustainability of the Bristol Bay fishery.

FisherPoets has been covered by The New York Times and radio specials on the BBC Radio 4. FisherPoet Pat Dixon has compiled a collection of FisherPoetry at www.inthetote.com.

Last summer, Dixon released “Anchored in Deep Water: The Fisherpoets Anthology,” a seven-book set with material from 40 American, Canadian and Japanese FisherPoets. The separate books or the set can be purchased at www.inthetote.com, at the Cannon Beach Book Co. or at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

Fishing for dreams

Astorian opens his boat, Cold Stream, for tours

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Each year, Astoria’s Dave Densmore opens Cold Stream, his wooden, 50-year-old piece of commercial fishing history, to visitors at Pier 39 during the FisherPoets Gathering.

“This boat is an extension of the people,” said Densmore, a fisherman for more than 60 years, raised in Kodiak, Alaska, and the Aleutian Islands chain. “It’s my identity, I guess.”

Densmore said he first stepped foot on a boat as a 6-year-old in Port Angeles, Wash., playing on a skiff in the playground at his school, looking out over the Puget Sound and daydreaming. By 12, he earned a full-man share working on boats, and by 13, he’d purchased his own vessel.

His working boat these days is the Dreamer, homeported in Larsen Bay, Alaska. Cold Stream, which he bought in 1996, is the project Densmore uses to give visitors a glimpse of what it’s like for the people catching the seafood.

“This is what’s called a West Coast combination boat,” said Densmore. “They were built to do anything. They came pretty close to perfection with this boat, as far as I’m concerned.”

The West Coast combos were all seiners, he said. The purse seine net hangs vertically in the water, the top buoyed by floats and the bottom weighted by sinkers, a line going through rings along the bottom, in order to purse it. The skiff encircles a school of fish with the net and returns to the main vessel, which then pulls the bottom line, purses the net and captures the fish.

The Cold Stream can troll, crab, longline, said Densmore, and carry up to 70,000 pounds of seafood. But 2005 was the last time Densmore said he’d fished with the boat, trolling for salmon.

Densmore entertained guests and old fishing buddies in the fo’c’sle (forecastle) Saturday morning, while his fishing partner for the past few years, Renee Ruscoe,



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Renee Ruscoe, left, gives a tour the Cold Stream, a fishing boat owned by fisherpoet Dave Densmore, Saturday. The tours of the boat, which was docked on Pier 39, were available to the public Saturday morning.

was on deck offering tours.

“People don’t think so much about where their food comes from,” said Ruscoe, who met Densmore through poetry readings in Cannon Beach in 2012, quit her white collar job, moved to the coast from Portland and started fishing with Densmore in Alaska.

Cold Stream was the last wooden boat built at Seattle’s Sagstad Shipyards, she said. It’s always been able to fish, he said, but over the mild winter he’s been fixing it up.

Inside the cramped fo’c’sle is a kitchen, stateroom and bunks enough to sleep eight. The boat can be mostly self-sustaining for four to five months except for fuel and water.

“We don’t spend a whole lot of time in here; you’re out there” said Densmore, who fishes with a crew of about four or five. “But evenings, when you’ve dropped anchor, it’s nice to have a warm place. And during storms and during the closures, when you can’t fish, this is a comfortable little boat.”

Densmore sees his boat as an extension of his identity and a point of pride, the same as a trucker might see his truck.

For U.S. Navy veteran Duane Narr and his wife, Arleen Narr of Newberg, it was their first time on a commercial fishing boat.

“I was really taken by the way it seems to be in people’s blood,” said Duane Narr. “My family’s from Minnesota and did farming in kind of a similar way. It’s what they did.”

Oscar B: Permanent landing should be complete by May 1

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Construction work started the Oregon side of the river, where crews are replacing the Westport Ferry landing with a permanent steel landing. A temporary dock is being used in the meantime.

The permanent landing is expected to be complete by May 1.

The Oregon work costs nearly \$2.5 million. About \$1.83 million is coming from the federal Ferry Boat Discretionary Program. Clatsop County, which applied for the federal funding, is covering the remaining costs.

“The permanent landing has a ways to go yet,” Ringen said. “They have a significant amount of work to do.”

Crews spent the weekend pulling old pilings used for the old Ferry Wahkiakum, and making sure the Oscar B fits in its landings. On the Washington side, Ringen said, crews still need to change out the end of the ramp, reconstructed in 2009, to better connect with the Oscar B.

The ferry service shut down Friday through Monday for the ferry captains to take practice runs across the river. The Coast Guard is scheduled to inspect the boat Monday morning, before it can become operational.

Once it starts operating next week, the Oscar B will have a weight limit to only handle cars and trucks up to 8 tons, which will not allow semitrailers. The weight limit will be in place until the Washington-side ramp work is completed in April.

Crews will shut down service the third week in April to



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A worker from Legacy Contracting directs the Oscar B ferry to the Westport dock during a test run along the Columbia River Friday. The Oscar B ferry arrived Friday from Whidbey Island, Wash.. The Oscar B will carry 23 passenger cars, nearly double the size of the original ferry.

COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

Wahkiakum County will host the celebration of the Oscar B at 1 p.m. March 14 at the Wahkiakum Ferry Terminal, 785 SR 409, Cathlamet, Wash.

finish the construction work.

Legacy Contracting Inc.’s bid for the Washington side work was \$574,837.

Ringen said he is still planning how to handle semi-trucks on the ferry, which the original ferry could not fit. He is considering a possible time schedule for semitrailers and a higher cost than the \$5 per trip for cars and trucks.

“We have to come up with a game plan on how all that works,” Ringen said.

The ferry crew of three captains, three mates and fill-in deckhands are pleased with the new ferry’s features, including hydraulic steering instead of cable and chain steering, a captain’s chair, updated electronics and ADA-accessible restrooms.

The Oscar B will carry 23 passenger cars, nearly double the size of the original ferry. The extra room will eliminate extra runs throughout the day since more passengers will be trans-

ported each trip. Commuters, including employees at the Wauna Mill in Westport, regularly rely on the ferry service.

The Wahkiakum County Commission started discussions about constructing a new ferry in 2006. The process started around 2010. Since then, Ringen said, the project passed multiple hurdles of the ferry’s construction, waiting for permit approvals on the river and other paperwork.

Now, after a 31-year career, Ringen is looking forward to riding the ferry into his retirement.

“There is always another project, but I don’t know if there will be one with this level of challenge,” Ringen said.

Burr: She has worked in public safety for the past 15 years

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At minimum, Burr is required to attend the monthly emergency preparedness committee meetings and twice-monthly container committee meetings, beginning this month. She plans to commute from Eugene, she said.

Kucera estimates that Burr will put in between 12 and 25 hours per month, or “whatever it takes to get the job done,” he said.

She will be paid \$15,000 for her work this fiscal year, which ends June 30; however, her salary may change when it is re-budgeted for next year, beginning July 1, Kucera said.

A ‘go-getter’

Burr has worked in public safety and disaster management for the past 15 years, developing emergency response plans specifically for mass sheltering and mass care. She has lent her expertise to the cities of Eugene and Florence; Lane, Linn and Benton counties; the American Red Cross of Oregon; the Regional Tribes of the Northwest; and the Oregon Department of Justice.

A hiring committee — composed of Kucera, Mushen, Vetter, Mayor Sam Steidel, Public Works Director Dan Grassick, Capt. Matt Gardner of Cannon Beach Fire and Rescue, and emergency pre-

paredness committee member Doug Wood — chose Burr from a pool of 10 applicants.

Those 10 were initially shortlisted to five candidates, who underwent hour-long interviews over a two-day period in mid-January. It ultimately came down to Burr and one other applicant. After lengthy discussion, Burr became the group’s unanimous choice, Kucera said.

“I think she’s going to be extremely helpful,” Vetter said. “She’s very knowledgeable. She’s very personable. She’s impressed us all as a go-getter.”

‘True collaboration’

Burr said the hiring process was “one of the more forward-thinking” she’s ever experienced.

Usually, “I just sit down with the city manager,” she said. But this time she faced “quite a robust group” of disaster stakeholders.

And, quite often, “you either have city officials that are really on point with disaster management and they’re dragging the community behind them, or it’s the opposite,” she said.

In Cannon Beach, both the city and the community seem to be on the same page, she said.

“It’s so refreshing to have this 21st century concept of true collaboration,” she said. “That rarely happens.”

— Erick Bengel