

A strong work ethic

Seaside attorney, judge, fisherman Bob Moberg retires after a fulfilling career

Robert Moberg, a Seaside attorney and municipal judge who is retiring this month, remembers Alderbrook as a wonderful place for a boy to grow up. There was the river where a child could swim, fish and boat, and you could sell the crawfish you found for 75¢ a dozen. His family had a duck shack upriver, and although Moberg didn't care for hunting he enjoyed the family outings and the Sand Island (comed beef) stew.

There was work, too. Moberg was racking nets for his gillnetter father, and working as a boat-puller, before he was 10 years old. "My father believed in the work ethic," Moberg says. At a very young age he was also working in the family business, which made cedar corks for fishing nets.

Bob Moberg's grandfather, Carl, arrived in the United States from Sweden in 1898 at the age of 17, having worked his way to Ellis Island, probably as a cabin boy. The family had been gillnetters in Sweden, so he took to the trade immediately upon arriving in Astoria. Although never fully fluent in English, he became chairman of the Union Fishermen's Cooperative Packing Company and CEO of Columbia Hospital.

David E. Moberg, Bob's father, operated a dredge and was a gillnetter "as far back as I can remember," says his son. He owned an Alderbrook drift right, a diver drift where nets fished the bottom, and was a hardhat diver who cleared the drift to prevent the nets fouling. In the late 1940s he purchased the cork mill at the foot of 49th Street in Astoria and operated it until the advent of cheap plastic corks put him out of business. After that he became the beach boss for Bumblebee Seafoods.

While his father was gone to Alaska, Bob Moberg fished with his father's gillnetter. "We'd fend for ourselves," he recalls, "I'd get out of high school

and, later, college, in May and fish the drift right for May and June." In July, Moberg would go to Alaska, and in August he would be back in Astoria, fishing below where the Astoria Bridge is today. "This was almost always done at night, and the jetties were a real danger to fishermen," Moberg says. "People lost their lives doing it."

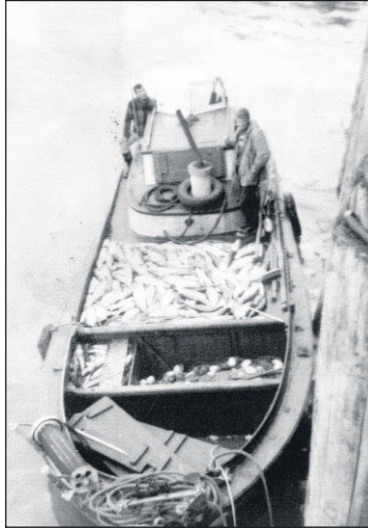
"Thinking back on it," Moberg says today, "it was very dangerous, but it was what young people did in Astoria at that time. It was part of the work ethic, to contribute to the family."

At 18, Moberg began fishing in Bristol Bay, which was more dangerous because of high winds and a tidal range twice that of Astoria, but other interests entered his life at this time. When he wasn't fishing he began attending Willamette University as an undergraduate and then as a law student, interning for state legislators Bill Holmstrom and Ted Bugas. The other interest began as a chance meeting with an attractive young woman from Palm Springs who was working in an Alaskan cannery. Moberg's interests in law and Kathy Moberg have both lasted a lifetime.

A new phase of Moberg's life began when he entered law school in Salem. For two years while he studied law, he interned with the Marion County District Attorney; he was one of the first students to take advantage of the new student appearance law, which allowed law students to make court appearances in misdemeanor cases. Moberg was also in the National Guard for six years.

Moberg graduated in 1972 and worked in the same office for two years before moving to Seaside as an employee of attorney Steve Campbell; he soon became a partner.

He continued fishing part time until 1980; by then his law practice was established. He was an eventual partner



Submitted photo

Bob Moberg, right, and his brother, Alan, are pictured on their boat having just come through a Bristol Bay storm to deliver fish to a Bumblebee cannery.

was Bill Canessa, with whom he had worked in the Bristol Bay fishery.

"I can honestly say that I loved and respected the fishermen, but not the work," Moberg says, "although we made pretty good livings." Neither he nor Kathy had to borrow a dime from their parents for their college expenses.

Four decades after arriving in Seaside, the departure of Moberg will leave the offices of Moberg and Rust with three attorneys. Moberg has, he says, "done it all" in the course of his legal career, but came to specialize in estate planning. Today he remains a consultant to the firm.

Shortly after moving to Seaside, Moberg was appointed Seaside municipal judge, handling misdemeanors from traffic citations to shoplifting, assault and disorderly conduct. "At the time," Moberg remembers, "it was held in the old city hall. I'd walk across the street from my office and up the rickety stairs." Moberg held court on Monday and Wednesday evenings, "accommodating people who had to work" until his retirement this year.

Moberg doesn't have a legal philosophy so much as a desire to help people caught in unfortunate circumstances.



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Bob Moberg, a Seaside attorney and judge, is retiring from his law firm, Moberg & Rust.



Submitted photo

The Moberg boat fishes Alaska waters.

"We've never had legal aid here," he observes, "and I've done a lot of pro bono work, sometimes on purpose and sometimes not. Helping people in need, in crisis, when you can actually help someone with a legal problem, that's rewarding."

Moberg doesn't plan to do much fishing in retirement. His time will be taken up with family, the Rotary Club of Seaside, the Oregon Community Foundation, and Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church. Not surprising in a man who finds his reward in helping others.

Coastal Life

Story by DWIGHT CASWELL