

# 'THE SALT OF THE EARTH'

THE 19TH ANNUAL FISHERPOETS GATHERING BRINGS COMMERCIAL FISHING POETRY, MUSIC, PHOTOGRAPHY, FILMS, WORKSHOPS AND MORE TO DOWNTOWN ASTORIA FEB. 26, 27 & 28

Story by DWIGHT CASWELL

I've made my living as a carpenter and a merchant seaman," says Clem Starck. "It's physical work. It's what I know, and so it's the subject matter of my poetry. Not exclusively, but it's what comes to me."

Starck writes what academics call "occupational folk poetry" — that is, poetry about the hazards and rewards, the tragedy and comedy of often physically challenging work. Starck simply says, "My poetry is down to earth and accessible. It's not esoteric. It's plain and simple. I use direct language." In other words, his poetry reflects the nature of his work, and he has done both the work and the words about the work for more than 50 years.

Starck comes to Astoria to read his poetry at almost every FisherPoets Gathering, and he'll be there again this year. "For me it is one of

the highlights of the year. There's nothing like it," he says. "It's quite authentic, not a lot of showmanship. It's the salt of the earth, with an interesting variety of voices."

"I always try to read a few new poems," Starck adds, "but I'm not very prolific."

It takes me a long time to write a poem." No matter. Starck has published five books of poetry, and he has a repertoire of about 150 poems to draw upon.

One of the people who will be listening attentively is Jon Broderick. It was at a reading at Linfield College, when Starck was an Oregon Book Award finalist, that Broderick first heard Starck's poetry. It came as a revelation to Broderick that you could write poetry about work,

Check out the official guide to this year's FisherPoets Gathering starting on page 13

and a few years later he began making the phone calls that led to



Photo by Joshua Bessex

Jay Speakman will lead a story circle at the Astoria Event Center from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Saturday, where commercial fishing veterans will tell tales of adventure or tedium working on the water.

the first FisherPoets Gathering. Starck's "work poetry," Broderick says, "was the inspiration for the FisherPoets Gathering."

That first gathering was held the last weekend of February 1998, and it has been held on that weekend every year since. Originally a small, unpretentious reunion of distant friends in commercial fisheries, the gathering today remains unpretentious, but every year it has grown. My, how it has grown. This year songwriters, storytellers and even photographers from commer-

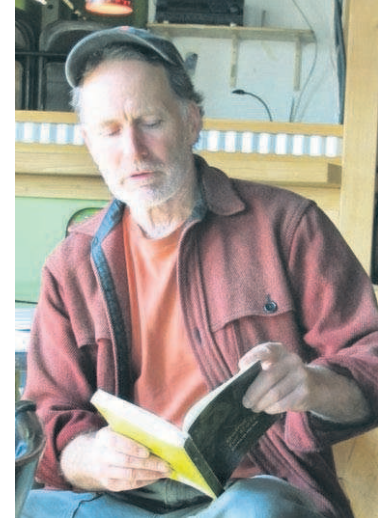
cial fishing communities on both coasts will participate. Deckhands, skippers, cannery workers, shipwrights, anyone in the fishing community with a taste for poesy will declaim or sing their work for the fans gathering in bars, restaurants, art galleries, the Columbian Theater, Clatsop Community College and the Columbia River Maritime Museum. This year there will be over 95 poets, including 26 new voices to add to the familiar ones. There will be new bands, comedy and "FisherKids."

"We've got everything," says Broderick.

FisherKids is overseen by Emilie Springer, a native of Homer, Alaska, and a Stanford-edu-

Photo by Joshua Bessex

Renee Ruscoe, left, gives a tour of the Cold Stream, a fishing boat owned by fisherpoet Dave Densmore, during the 2015 festival. Tours of the boat, docked on Pier 39, are available to the public again this year from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday morning.



Submitted photo

The FisherPoets Gathering came about from some phone calls fisherman Jon Broderick made back in 1998.

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cated longtime commercial salmon fisher, anthropologist and fisherpoet. When she's not reciting, she'll be at Baked Alaska's new annex providing activities for kids that will include storytelling and oral histories.

Corey Arnold is a commercial fisher in Alaska who until recently was a deckhand on the f/v Rollo crabbing in the Bering Sea. Now he runs a sockeye salmon setnet operation out of Bristol Bay, but don't expect to hear him reading any poems about chasing fish or crab. Arnold is a widely published and exhibited photographer who is chronicling the commercial fishing lifestyle throughout the world. His exhibit at Imogen Gallery coincides with FisherPoets, but his unique contribution to the Gathering will be large projections of his images on the walls of downtown buildings.

There will be a second photography exhibit at the Gathering: "Lost at Sea: Remembering the Victims of the F/V

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