

# 'WORK SPACES' CHRONICLES ASTORIA'S CHANGING INDUSTRIES

BY JONATHAN WILLIAMS

Michael Mathers was rowing up the John Day River when he hit a piling in the water and nearly fell over. That's when the idea for his next photography project hit him.

He said, "there was a workshop on the road there and I saw it and thought, workshops, why not do that?"

After over two years dedicated to the project, Mathers is showing 144 photos of locals at work in "Work Spaces" at the Royal Nebeker Art Gallery at Clatsop Community College now through Nov. 27 with a reception from 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7.

## Unsung heroes

The show shines a light on the unsung workers and industries in Astoria. The work spaces Mathers focuses on are as disparate as a hand crafted light designer, bakers, marijuana growers and a winery owner.

"There are so many remarkable individuals here who are doing things that people don't know about," Mathers said. "This is an extremely unique town for the colorful characters and for the diversity of professions."

He started the project photographing Clatsop Power who he asked for names of other people to photograph, which he asked each person he photographed so his list of people to photograph continued to get larger.

"People who work with their bodies are grounded, they look like they belong there, they were comfortable standing. White collar workers didn't have that same groundedness," Mathers said.

In a previous project called "Inside Astoria" he went to 150 houses and took photos of people.

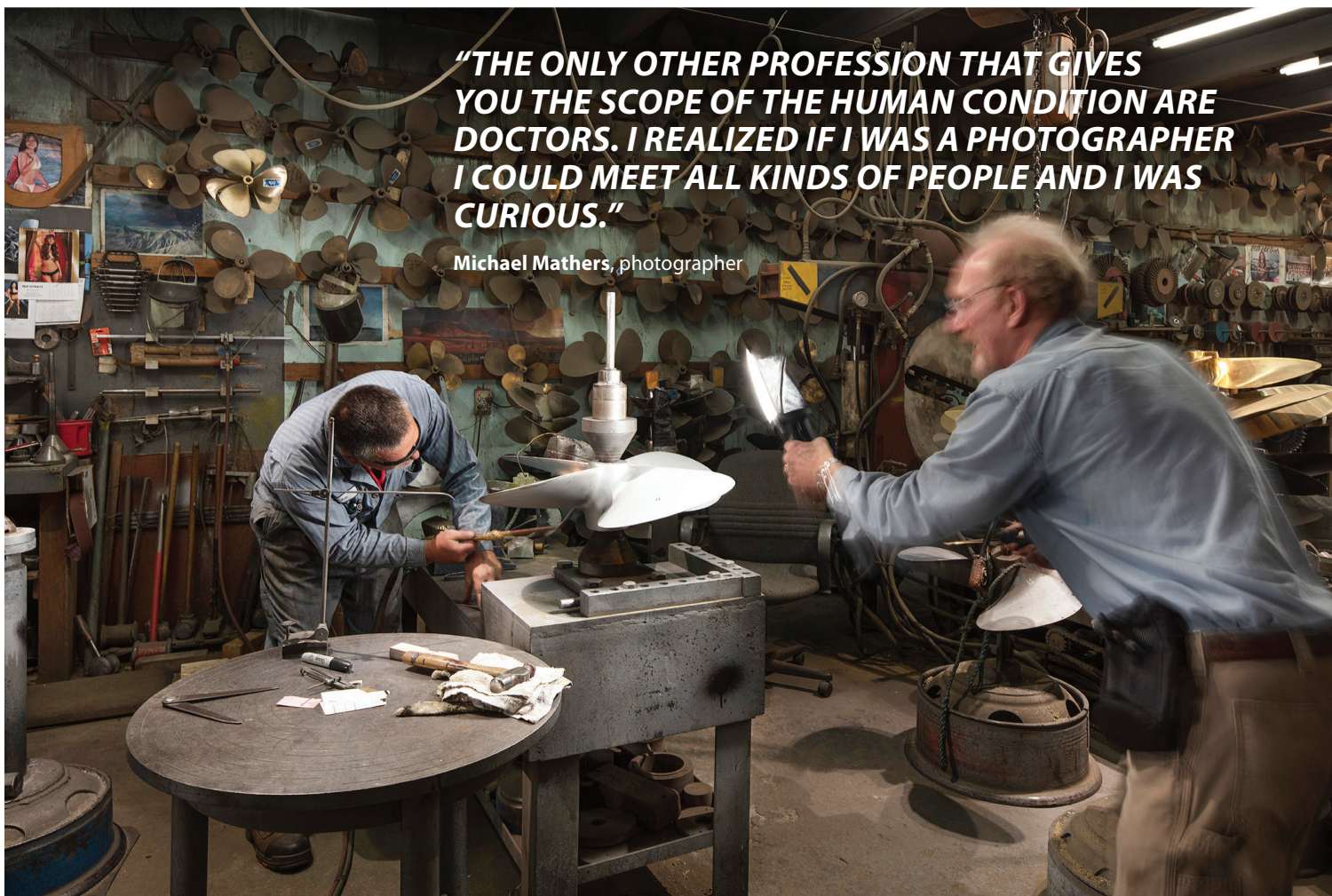
Mathers' projects have taken him to many heights. He even climbed atop the Astoria Bridge with city workers for a previous project on city workers.

Mathers said he'd ideally like to be a fly on the wall when he takes pictures.

When he would take pictures of people for this project, he would consider what the composition is going to be and walk around the people while he's "painting his picture" visually.

Memorable characters include Paul Van der Veldt at Shallon Winery, a 93-year-old ex-Harley-Davidson biker and trompe l'oeil painter, a man who lives in the middle of the forest five miles off a dirt road in a com-

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**"THE ONLY OTHER PROFESSION THAT GIVES YOU THE SCOPE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION ARE DOCTORS. I REALIZED IF I WAS A PHOTOGRAPHER I COULD MEET ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE AND I WAS CURIOUS."**

Michael Mathers, photographer

Photos by Michael Mathers

Photographer Michael Mathers, right, photographing a worker at West Coast Propeller.



Workers at the now closed Home Bakery.



An industrial work space.