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pletely solar powered house and A.F. Dick Manufacturing, the largest machine shop west of the Mississippi in Knappa.

“You hear peoples’ life stories in 10 minutes,” he said.

Many times, he’d come home from a shoot and sit down with his wife, Petra, and make an audio recording of the stories he heard. Petra is also his editor and helped him select images for the show.

She is a children’s book author and illustrator and has done 44 books which have been published in four languages including her most well-known to coastal residents, “Lottie’s New Beach Towel.” Petra is a four-time winner of the annual New York Times prize for Best Illustrated Children’s Book.

Coming to Astoria

Mathers and his wife moved to Astoria from Portland over 25 years ago.

He was born in Washington D.C. in 1945 and grew up in New York City. He attended Harvard University, where his love for photography began during his final year of school.

“My last year at Harvard, I took a photography class and I basically stopped going to school and I just took pictures,” he said.

All through college he “road the rails” — riding trains across the country with hitchhikers and “hobos.” His first photo book, “Riding the Rails,” documented this.

This project helped him get into the photo class, which was overbooked.

Mathers realized then what photography could give him.

“The only other profession that gives you the scope of the human condition are doctors,” he said. “I realized if I was a photographer I could meet all kinds of people and I was curious.”

His first camera was a 4x5 box camera that went on tripod and you had to put a hood over your head to take photos of people.

Mathers was able to stay at Harvard and teach a photo class. Over the course of his career, he has published eight books of photography focusing on shepherders, architecture and people he’s met. His photos have also appeared in magazines like the New York Times Magazine. After graduating, he spent time photographing the Ethiopian bush as a still photographer.

Changing town, industry

Many of the industries Mathers has photographed have changed or even disappeared all together.

“I have photographed buildings that come to an end,” Mathers said.



HiiH Lights owner Lâm Quảng at work.



A farmer at work.



Shallon Winery owner Paul Van der Veldt.

Since he started the project, Home Bakery, Astoria Airport Crab Pot, Spencer’s Instrument Repair (formerly Thompson’s Instrument Repair) and Astoria Marine Construction Co. have shut their doors.

“Astoria has been discovered,” Mathers said.

He’s not certain about the city’s future and feels its become a destination town.

“Logging is gone, fishing is pretty much finished. The quirkiness of Astoria is now in breweries and dope shops,” he said.

He spent four months photographing local veterinarian Russell Hunter, 75, and doesn’t think anyone can replace him.

“The kind of operation he runs and the way he deals with people, no one else is going to replace it,” Mathers said.

Mathers said he’s never had this much fun on a project.

“The books that I’d done I’d have to drive all the way across the country or ride the rails but here it is just so fertile of visuals and it is so open. People are just sort of open. I don’t know how long that will happen,” he said.

Mathers is already at work on his next project: people and their pets.

“It’s not just cats and dogs, it’s snakes and big animals,” he said.

If You Go

‘Working Spaces’

6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7 opening reception

Royal Nebeker Art Gallery, Clatsop Community College, 1799 Lexington Ave., Astoria

“Talking about a dog is talking about human relations and so you learn so much,” he said. “The best stuff of the human condition is people talking about their animal.”