

# County's 'King of the Road'

## Doc Sherer retires at 70

While John Denver may have made a fortune singing about "Country Roads," Harold "Doc" Sherer has made a career out of fixing them—often with a less than adequate budget.

Probably no one knows more about how to get from one place to another in Morrow County than Sherer, who says that he has "walked every road in the county" at least once during his 42-year association with the county road department.

That association came to an end Wednesday, when Morrow County's "King of the Road" served his last day as county roadmaster and began retirement.

Sherer joined the county road department at the age of 27 in 1936, giving up a job with Pacific Power & Light "and milking 22 head of cows" to become a truck driver and rock crusher operator for the county.



County Roadmaster Doc Sherer

He was named supervisor in 1943, before the job title was changed to roadmaster around 1950. He's seen a number of changes in the county road system since that time.

When "Doc" joined the road crew, nearly all county roads were dirt, and it was considered a luxury to live along a road based with crushed rock. As time progressed, the county road network expanded, more miles received a crushed rock base, and a few more were oiled. In present-day Morrow

County, the county-maintained road system stretches 1,080 miles, including 385 miles of paved roadway.

Under Sherer's supervision, county road crews have built their own bridges, altered road routes, and performed other tasks for which many counties would seek outside help.

Probably the largest single accomplishment performed during Sherer's tenure was the development of the Bombing Range Road, connecting southern Morrow County to the Boardman area.

Rather than growing in size, the county road crew has decreased in number over the years. "It's been as high as 24,

and now it's down to 10," Sherer said. "I could use twice the crew."

But some things don't change. The road department has always been hard pressed to maintain roads to the public's satisfaction with funds that would often have difficulty filling a good-sized chockhole. Springtime thaws have always played havoc with the county road system, and sporadic floods have continued to present Sherer with a variety of engineering puzzles.

And if there's a complaint about a county road, for decades the buck has stopped with "Doc."

"I've been here so long I've made as many enemies as friends," Sherer said. Last year, when one unruly citizen informed Sherer that he planned to distribute posters calling for the roadmaster to be fired, "I said go ahead. I'd even help. We get lots of criticism, some of it warranted and some of it not."

In 1948, voters failed to approve the county budget, resulting in the layoff of all road crew members except for Sherer and the idling of all road maintenance equipment. "Then," he recalled, "a water spout hit and took out six

bridges. Since I was the only man in the road department, I went and put out detour signs—it was all I could do." Sherer credits the storm with prompting voters to approve the county's first road serial levy, approved shortly after the incident.

Sherer, who has served under six county judges, stated that one of the pleasures of his job has been that "I've always had a good court to work with. They've always backed me up 100 per cent."

Sherer's praise is returned by the county's current chief executive, Judge D.O. Nelson. "Trying to replace him is going to be something else," he said. "I hate to see him leave, but I can understand it. With the money he's had available, he's done a great job."

"I guess I'll be glad to get away from all the problems, but I kind of hate to leave, too," said the retiring roadmaster, whose animated vitality belies his 70 years. "From Irrigon to the top of the Blue Mountains—it's always been a challenge."

But few men can enter retirement knowing their life's work can be measured in the thousands of miles.

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