

Former Seaside coach has

A LIFETIME OF MEMORIES

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



If there's one man who represents the spirit of Seaside, it's Stubby Lyons. Lyons, a former teacher, championship-winning coach, volunteer and longtime member of the City Council is 84, living his retirement in the Southeast Hills.

We caught up with him at his home with his wife of more than 20 years, Sharee Opitz, also a former Seaside teacher. Today, son Lance lives in Bend and daughter Lacey in Seaside.

Part Sioux, Raphael Lyons Jr. was raised on a reservation in North Dakota, one of 10 children of Anne and Ray Lyons.

The obvious question: Why the nickname "Stubby"?

"I was born at home, and after about three or four days they thought they should get me to the reservation hospital to get me checked out," Lyons recalled. "My dad said, 'Give me a suitcase and a couple of fluffy blankets in there.' I was stubby enough to fit in it. And that's what he called me."

A more unlikely "Stubby" would be hard to find — the ex-Marine stood at about 6-foot-2-inches tall at his full height.

The family moved to the Pacific Northwest in 1942, when Stubby was 7.

Wartime employment was at a high and his father worked in the machine shop in Hanford, Washington. "My dad actually worked on the atomic bombs," Lyons said. "It was very secretive."

The family lived in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho — the only city in the US with an apostrophe, Lyons remarked. "I went to school there and graduated there."

As a 20-year-old Marine, Lyons spent 14 months in Korea as a military officer in the demilitarized zone.

After eight years in the service, he returned home and pursued his education on the GI Bill, attending Eastern Washington College in Cheney and earning his master's at Pacific University in Forest Grove.

His teaching and coaching career began at age 35, first in Nevada, then Washington state.

But the Oregon Coast was his dream destination. "I always wanted to live near the ocean."

When a vacancy became available in the Seaside School District, Lyons put his application in. "The principal said, 'Can you be up here tomorrow for an interview?' I said, 'Yes, I guess I can.' I jumped in the car and the principal said, 'Would you take this job if we offered it to you?' I said yes. He called the next day, Saturday, and said, 'You start Monday.'"

Lyons taught "everything" at Seaside High School, he said, "English, U.S. history, personal finance, a law class — 16 different classes."

Championship season

As head coach, Lyons had already led one team in Idaho and three teams in Nevada to championships, including the first in Nevada to win a girls basketball championship.

Arriving in Seaside in 1980, he served as assistant for Jim Auld before taking the head coach role.

Lyons led the Gulls extraordinary state championship 1994 football team, the first championship team since 1959.

"We had great talent," Lyons recalled. "Adam Israel. Casey Jackson. Nate Burke. Ben Archibald — he was a lineman, later with the 49ers, Calgary and Vancouver. He was a real dandy. My son, Lance Lyons. He could run and throw, really run. He was 6'-2", 6'-3". He wasn't a good drop back, but he was a great rollout. He threw 17 or 18 touchdown passes that year."

The team, greeted with passionate enthusiasm throughout the community, was inspired by Lyons' enthusiasm on and off the field.

"I knew we were going to have a pretty good football team that year," he said. "So I thought I'd get a personal license plate: 'FIRE UP.' Those are the same license plates I've got on my truck right now."



File photo

Former Seaside City Councilor Stubby Lyons receives a plaque from Seaside Mayor Don Larson honoring Lyons' 14 years of service on the City Council and his extensive involvement in community activities. Lyons said later that it was the "best plaque" he had ever received. A former Seaside High School teacher and football coach, Lyons, who resigned from the council last year, was honored at the March 9 City Council meeting.



ABOVE LEFT Sharee and Stubby Lyons at their Seaside home. ■ BELOW LEFT Stubby Lyons' signature license plate, used as an inspirational slogan for the 1994 championship Gulls football team. ■ RIGHT Stubby Lyons as a high school basketball star in Coeur D'Alene Idaho. Lyons says his No. 1 sport was football.

More than 3,000 Gulls fans were reported to have traveled to Autzen Stadium in Eugene to watch the Gulls win the championship 27-14 over Brookings Harbor, overcoming a 14-10 halftime deficit.

After the game, the Signal reported at the time, Lyons went to his knees. "I made a promise I was going to say a little prayer along the sidelines right after the game if we won, and I did," Lyons said at the time.

Today, Lyons still meets up with team alumni to share memories at Dundee's.

'A real good council'

Lyons retired from teaching in 1999, and entered a period of community service and civic involvement.

A lifetime member of the Marine Corps League, Elks, American Legion and VFW, he won election to Seaside's City Council in 2000.

Looking back, Lyons said he regretted the contention surrounding a proposed U.S. Highway 101 bypass.

He was an advocate of the library's building plans as a member of the library committee.

City Manager Mark Winstanley "has a real good eye," Lyons said. "He had a real good crew, a real good council."

Seaside's downtown improvement efforts have paid off since his arrival in 1980, he added.

"When I first came into town, I thought, 'God, this is a mess.' We drove down Broadway — it was two ways — then, we rode around the Turnaround. There was sand all over the place, lights broken. It looked like hell. These people didn't realize they had a gold mine here! The beach alone is a gold mine!"



Romance

Lyons married his second wife, a former Seaside High School teacher, in 1998 after being introduced by sophomore students interested in playing matchmaker. "The kids came up to me and said, 'Coach, we have just the person you should take out.' I said, 'Who's that?' They said 'Sharee Opitz.' I said, 'Oh, she's really a good-looking woman. She would never go out with a slob like me.'" "They said, 'Yes, she would.'"

The students urged him to express his feelings in a letter, which he still has on his wall.

The students told him to sign it "love." "No, I'm not going to sign it 'love,'" he told the students. "I don't even know her. I'd only met her once, at a reception one night."

Lyons compromised by putting a little heart by the signature.

The students volunteered to deliver the letter personally. Unbeknownst to Lyons, they delivered not only the letter, but with a little help from Coach Auld, contributed a bouquet of flowers from Safeway.

"Sharee's like, 'Who's this guy, anyway?'" Lyons said.

After quizzing friends about her potential suitor, she was advised "he'd be a good guy to go out with."

The romance blossomed and "every night we danced at the Shilo," he recalled. "We loved to dance."

Lyons stays close to home these days; his daughter Lacy helps with the shopping.

Lyons still likes to get outside and enjoy his property. "I get out there once in awhile, feed the birds, make sure the water in the bird bath is good," he said. "You know, we have a bear up here. It was up here the other night — took off the lid and ate the garbage."



R.J. Marx

Beautiful weather brings the fishermen to the sea.

Conditions are excellent for surfperch

This morning on my early dog walk, I noticed a trio of men parked in the lot at the end of Avenue U, preparing their fishing gear. Having lately observed what appears to be an unusual number of people casting on the beach, I asked them if it was a special time of year for surf casting and they said, "Well, yes." They said when the clamming is good, it's also a good time to surf cast.

What are you catching? I asked. "Surfperch," they said.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX



According to a YouTube video I downloaded, the best time for surf fishing on the Oregon coast is during calm surf. Surfperch apparently can be caught on our beaches year 'round. The technique is pretty straightforward. It seems most folks use a salmon rod, a 2-ounce weight, and then just plant their feet in the ocean. Waders are optional. Gulp sandworms are popular bait, as are mole crabs, marine worms, sandshrimp, mussels, and clam necks.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife website advises the most abundant target for the surf angler is surfperch. These slim, saucer-shaped fish can reach up to 2 pounds. Nine different species of surfperch can be found off the Oregon coast, but the fish most often caught are redbtail surfperch. These fish are known to congregate within 30 feet of the shoreline, presenting an accessible target.

When I was a kid growing up in a beach town on the East Coast, my favorite sort-of stepfather was a big fan of surf fishing. He didn't care to fish the beach as much as he liked getting out on a jetty. I remember an exciting day when he lost his footing and plunged into the Atlantic. He drove my mother crazy when he commandeered an entire wall of the dining room to store his rods and reels. We ate what he caught, and he gave the surplus away. Like many fishermen, he threw back pregnant female fish to help repopulate the waters.

I might have made the three men I spoke to a tad uncomfortable when I asked if there was a limit. They were vague on the subject. Oregon requires an angling license to fish for surfperch. The Department of Fish and Wildlife webpage hasn't been updated on the subject, but the last posted bag limit is pretty generous, 15 fish per day. Although surfperch are available year round, spring and early summer are the most productive time of year for anglers as they are schooling up along sandy shorelines for spawning. The best time to fish is said to be an hour or two before high tide. Experts advise taking advantage of low tides to scout out good surfperch water; look for deep holes or depressions and steeply sloped beaches where the waves break hard. Rocky areas in the sand, or sandy areas near jetties, or where the shore cuts inward are also advised.

Surfperch fishing requires sturdy tackle, not because the fish are so big or heavy, but to handle the heavy surf. While every fisherman has their personal preferences when it comes to tackle, the basics are a 9- to 11-foot rod capable of handling a 2- to 6-ounce weight. You'll also need a spinning reel large enough to hold 200-300 yards of 15- to 30-pound monofilament line. My personal advice if you're new to this sport is to stop by Jim Brien's Bait & Tackle Shop located at 766 Avenue S in Seaside. Go in and talk to him. Jim will fix you up.