

Newman, owner of Newman's at 988, remembered as an influential chef and mentor

Restaurant owner died in crash

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

John Newman, the owner of Newman's at 988 in Cannon Beach, was remembered by friends and family as an influential chef and mentor with a generous spirit.

Newman, 58, of Pacific City, died in a car crash in Tillamook County. He was driving west on Oregon Highway 130, went off the road and struck a utility pole. His vehicle went into a river near Little Nestucca County Park, according to Oregon State Police. The submerged vehicle was reported on June 20.

Bob Neroni, who owns EVOO, a recreational cooking school and restaurant in Cannon Beach, with his wife said, "We're all kind of in a mortified, surreal state right now. Just can't believe it."

The Astorian named Newman's fine dining eatery, which served French and Italian cuisine, "Restaurant of the Year" for 2006, the year the downtown establishment opened. Before that, Newman was the executive chef at the Stephanie Inn in Cannon Beach.

Chris Holen, the chef and owner of Nekst Event and former owner of Baked Alaska in Astoria, called Newman one of the most influential chefs on the Oregon Coast in a generation.

"Every chef worth his salt in Clatsop County has been touched by John Newman at one point or another," Holen said.

Newman's wife, Sandy, said in a message that he was the love of her life. They met in college on California's central coast and would have celebrated 30 years of marriage in October, she said.

On June 21, Cannon Beach Mayor Sam Steidel remembered Newman at a City Council meeting.

"John Newman was a cherished restaurateur who actually helped develop, to me, the quality of restaurants that we have in town because he cooked at several of them throughout his career here, created his own and beyond," Steidel said.

Geoff Gunn, the executive chef and general manager of Bridgewater Bistro in Astoria, has been talking with area chefs in the wake of Newman's death.

"We thought that he would just outlast everyone," Gunn said. "His soul was just bigger than life, and it's a huge hit to the community and the culinary world."

In his profession, Newman was remembered as ambitious yet humble. Insofar as he competed with his fellow chefs, he did so with affection.

And Newman respected their work.

Peter Roscoe, the founder of Fulio's in Astoria, said, "If he was going to borrow a recipe, he wouldn't just do it. He'd call up and say, 'Hey, I'm thinking of putting this on the menu — is it OK with you?' Of course it always was."

Neroni said Newman was "always there as a resource and just always gave. He was not just an incredible culinarian, but just an incredible individual."

Newman learned his craft globally. An alum of New York's Culinary Institute of America, he also studied on Oahu in Hawaii and worked in Europe, according to his restaurant's website.

On the North Coast, Newman became a mentor for young chefs, opening doors for people pursuing careers in the restaurant industry.

Newman once asked Holen to join him as a cook at the James Beard House in New York City. For a chef to



Sous chef Dru Shaffer with chef John Newman in 2021.

Our Coast

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— Sam Steidel, Cannon Beach mayor

be invited to ply his or her trade at that house, which Newman did several times, is "one of the biggest honors you can have," Holen said.

"It was John's way of presenting what the Northwest has to offer to the world on the biggest culinary stage in the country," Holen said, "and it was a really big deal for us."

As a board member of United Way of Clatsop County, Newman helped found the Iron Chef Goes Coastal competition, a fundraiser that raised many thousands of dollars annually for the nonprofit, which serves struggling individuals and families. He won the competition several times.

Newman served as a chef and culinary consultant at Cannon Beach Conference Center and as an instructor at Tongue Point Job Corps Center and Seaside High School. Under his tutelage, his Seaside students cooked competitively on the national level.

Newman's friend, John Sowa, the executive chef at Silver Salmon Grille and former Cannon Beach restaurateur, was impressed by how Newman — with his business, teaching and other activities — extended himself in the community.

"I couldn't figure out how he could do as much as he did in a given day, and still go surfing," Sowa said.

Newman was indeed a passionate surfer. "We'd always say, 'Oh, where's John?'" Gunn said. A common answer: "He's at a 'board' meeting."

Newman's older brother, Matt Newman, who lives in Chicago, recalled growing up in a family with six children in the 1960s. He said his parents got divorced and that their mother, an artist, traveled for her work. Matt Newman said his brother overcame a tricky childhood, moving through numerous new schools and with little money.

"To me, the fact that he has just a humble and positive demeanor in spite of the challenging obstacles is truly amazing," he said. "You know, so many people break and they don't get up from those situations."

Matt Newman didn't realize the extent of his brother's influence until reading online comments after his death.

Jonathan Hoffman, the owner of The Nest Bakery in Warrenton and Dough Dough Bakery in Seaside, said Newman could take people that no other establishment wanted or thought they could use, people who got overlooked by the industry, and turn them into professionals.

"He could take a monkey into his kitchen and train them to make amazing food

like he did," Hoffman said.

The number of people he did that with, who are still in the community doing what Newman taught them, is part of his legacy. The next

person who will fill that role will be difficult to find, Hoffman said.

When Gunn was living in Hillsboro and decided to relocate to the coast, he

called Newman, whom he had met at a cooking competition. Newman got Gunn an interview with Martin Hospitality, which owns the Stephanie Inn.

"I always told him he was the best chef that I've ever known," Gunn said. "And then he would look at me and say, 'No, no, no — you're the best chef that I've ever known.'"

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