

Participant: Dave Bassett

Title: President, Rotary Club of Port Orford

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Courtney: To start, could you just state your name and what your...

Dave: Dave Bassett. I'm a registered engineer.

C: Okay. Um, can you talk about how long you've been in Port Orford?

D: I came to Port Orford in 1995 and bought 57 acres, which I subdivided and got final plat for that subdivision in 2001 and the first house was finished right as the same time as 9/11 of 2001 so the market went flat. Eventually it was a good experience but it was initially a very demanding experience, particularly in Port Orford 'cause whenever the economy of Oregon hiccups, Port Orford dies.

C: Yeah. How did you decide to come to Port Orford?

D: Um, we were gonna go to New Zealand and New Zealand was impractical. It was 14 hours away, um, by air and in a different day and if you were totally retired with no family and no business and no other activities New Zealand would be a great answer, but it, but that's not the case. Had family in Grants Pass, used to and, uh, a lot of business dealings and so the Oregon Coast was cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter and we liked that. Um, my wife looked at, we went on a trip after New Zealand didn't work out and we went on a trip and she looked at Brookings and saw Freddie's and said, "No, I don't think so." And Gold Beach is a kind of perched on the hills type of place and we found Port Orford and she goes, "I like this little town." So we had a place up Elk River first and then Norma Monroe, our real estate broker, came over and showed us a, um, a little A-frame on the lake that had been, um, not abandoned but not maintained for many years. And we got that and have been working and happy with it ever since.

C: What kinds of groups or organizations, of course Rotary, but what else have you been involved with since you moved here?

D: I just finished two years as State President as, for the Professional Engineers of Oregon. We represent 7,000 registered engineers, 400 active members and I just finished that before beginning the Presidency of Rotary here in July of this year, of '16.

C: Can you tell me a little bit about what your day to day life is like in Port Orford, the types of issues that you're working on with your various groups or other activities here?

D: Well, when I got here and we bought the place on Garrison Lake in 2000, um, the lake, Garrison Lake, was way up, way down, way up, way down and that's because the El Nino storms of '97 and '98 had taken out the outlet, the channel creek that allowed Garrison Lake to stay at a uniform level. So it was really bad. There were, it didn't flood us, but it flooded a number of

people around the lake. And then it would get so high that it would blow out across the beach and then it would go clear down to nothing. It was, it was a disaster. So, I...that was when Herna Barnett was City Manager and I told her that there had to be a better answer. Gary Doren was Mayor. I said, "There's gotta be a better answer than the way you're doing it" and he said "Well, you can become the permittee and do whatever you want." So, I did. And that was my first big public donation to Port Orford is I designed the outflow, came up with the concept for what became the route that the State Parks did when they acquired Agate Beach RV Park and they took the outlet from the lake underground for a bit, as well established the lake level by having the outflow at the proper route. And they took it through Round Lake, Little Hook Lake and out to Notch Rock, all of which I had identified as the route. And so it got built. It got built in, um, let's see, '04 or '05 maybe. It got built and it's worked well ever since, and that was my first big public contribution to Port Orford was to control the, what we called Elevator Lake, which was Garrison Lake. It was out of control. It was flooding four or five homes in the basements and, and one of 'em clear into the main floor so, uh, it needed doing and it's been working just fine ever since.

C: You said that was your first big public contribution. Do you have any others that are...

D: Yeah, well then I got involved in the Fire Board and helped there for quite awhile, a little while. And then I've been on the Port Commission for five years now. And I've been a Rotarian for seven years. And that always give me a good place. I'm back-up building official to Curry County and to the City of Brookings because that's what I did for Medford and Josephine County for many years. As an engineer and building official I was head of the building safety department in Medford for 23 years and Josephine County for about 12.

C: Wow. Okay, great. Now we're gonna switch gears a little bit from the just talking about you to talking about Port Orford as a community, so can you tell me more about the community, whether that's demographics, the people who live here, the economy...

D: Well, it's changing. Port Orford has been on the cusp of greatness for decades and it may eventually get there. Um, since 1995 until this year this has been a town, um, polarized. About 50/50 those that don't want to see any change and those that want to see some. And it's played out in various ways. Um, a recall election that should never have been brought forward. Um, a vote for various positions that, that didn't make much sense. Um, a lot of division on the council where it was 50/50. I'm sure Mayor Jim spoke to that. Uh, but for the first time since I've been here in 1995 just a month ago ODOT made a presentation to restripe 101 into two traffic lanes and a center turn line like they did at Cave Junction and guess what, um, about 40 people in the audience. Thirty-seven were in favor and three were opposed. Three very, very anti, very vocal, very loud opposed, but still only three. Thirty-seven in favor. And that translated to the council voting five in favor and one against, which was the first time since 1995 that I have seen this town move forward in a major, on a major issue with a clear majority. It's usually 50/50. And so that is, that is a great hope to me that Port Orford can get out it's Hatfield and Macoy mode.

C: What do you think accounts for that change?

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D: Um, fear. Fear of change. Fear of not being able to have your kids afford to live here. Um, seeing what has happened in California and other places. Port Orford is being discovered. There's families moving here from all over the world because we have water and they don't wherever they are, in...certainly in Arizona, New Mexico, Southern California. I just did five plan checks for the county and every one of 'em was for a family moving from somewhere else. So, it's, um, people have found this to be a safe haven of, and relatively low cost. And they're afraid of that changing. And I can understand that. But if you don't grow some, you are in fact dying because things are always deteriorating and things are always changing. There is a natural downward slide and if you don't balance that with some growth you are in fact headed into economic doldrums. Port Orford has been a depressed area. It's one of the lowest per capita income. Has one of the highest student health problems. Um, dental problems. Just inadequate income for a lot of the population to live comfortably. It's kind of a town of the haves and the have nots. And it's been about 50/50. And I'm sorry if that sounds harsh but that's pretty much the way it's been.

C: Yeah. Can you tell me more about the role of fishing specifically in the economy here?

D: About what?

C: About fishing.

D: Well, I'm not a fisherman. I used to fish when I was a kid, but I haven't had time to do that. Um, those that enjoy it, I get to see a lot of people who make their living as fishermen as a Port Commissioner. The commercial fishermen. I know some of them pretty well. It's a dangerous job. Um, can be rewarding. Can also be devastating. You can lose it all in a heart beat. In addition to it being dangerous, it's a tough economic job. There's a lot of weather time that you can't be out on the ocean or you shouldn't be. There's a lot of quota restrictions and licensing restrictions. Gary Anderson, our prior port manager talked about going into the fishing business in the early '70s, I think he said it cost him \$3500. Today it's a quarter of a million or more just to get into the business. So you don't see a lot of young guys stepping up other than through a family. Fishermen here tend to be generational or they're brought in by an uncle or a father or a grandfather or something to become fishermen because it's, it's a specialized trade. It's a dangerous trade. It's kinda like logging. It's, it's an industry that...it's, you can do well, but it's difficult to do well.

C: Yeah. You sort of already answered but I was gonna ask if you'd seen any changes in those family-based businesses in the fishing industry?

D: Um, yeah, the... most of the high school graduates don't stay here. A few come back if they have a family opportunity or a family business or just plain want to be here and are willing to do what it takes to be here. But most of 'em leave. Most of the graduates from our high school spend at least three to five, sometimes ten, fifteen or twenty years somewhere else. And a lot of 'em consider this home, but it's difficult for them to come back and make a living here.

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C: Yeah. Um, what do you think the impact might be on Port Orford if there are those barriers for young people to get into fishing? What do you think will happen here if you know the fishermen are getting older and it's harder for young people to get into the industry?

D: Well, there's a lot of 'em retiring. Some of 'em retire themselves and sell their business and their boat. Some of 'em retire themselves and their boat and their business. Um, there used to be I think 33 active vessels on the port. And that's gone down by four or five. There's been a couple lost at sea, which was terrible this year. And they don't seem to, we've had one new boat, the Misty that had been worked on for years that is now on the port but other than that and a number of sport fishermen I really can't think of anybody that has recently come into being at the port as a active commercial fishermen. Usually when you lose somebody it's lost. Not always, but usually.

C: What impact do you think that will have here on the community if, you know, we lose people?

D: Well, you know, every community is different. Um, I worked in Medford when it was very dependent upon agriculture and logging and, uh, those two big economic drivers, uh, in the middle '80s both went flat. Both went way down in the early '80s and so Medford was in a depressed condition from '81 to '83 or 4. And along came the Rogue Valley Mall and we thought that that would... I was head of building safety so I got to see all this. In the '70s we were building almost 700 new homes at the end of the '70s. In 1981 we built 26. So there's a huge drop in activity. Enormous drop in activity. Along came '84 and '85 with the Rogue Valley Mall and we thought that would be the biggest year for decades. The very next year was \$27 million more and never stopped. So Medford reached critical mass for medical, retirees, transportation, business in general and they reached that certain point where every big box store, all the Costcos and all the Big Lots and those kinds of shopping centers, all wanted to be there all at the same time. Both hospitals were going full tilt all the time. And so retirement in Medford was a economic factor such as the town had never seen. And all during the '80s and '90s that drove the Medford economy. Health, transportation, retirees, medical. And so those other traditional things that supported the community diminished greatly. That's kinda what's happening here is tourism, retirees, um, people who are moving here with their own other sources of income other than local jobs are moving here and that is what's driving our Port Orford economy at this point. In fact, Jim Seeley and Dave Lacey and Miles Phillips will be here on September 22nd to tell us about it at Rotary. Some people don't like tourism. Most people do because as Tom McCall put it, "Come, spend your money, and go home." Well, some of 'em don't go home. I know one family that just got here and they bought several pieces of property because they couldn't believe how inexpensive and reasonable it was here. So. This is, this is the last opportunity of affordable property on the Oregon Coast, right here.

C: Yeah. What other options for careers are there for young people here if they can't get into the fishing industry?

D: I really don't know. There's fishing, sorta, kinda, as we've talked about. Not much in the way of logging anymore. Resource extraction. Um, there's some retail opportunities I guess. Uh, there's a number of artisans and craftsmen if somebody has the talent and skill to do that. It's

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becoming kind of a community, it is a community of artisans and craftsmen and musicians. Doey Blackstone is a musician. Dave Cooper that was just here makes his living as a square dance caller and queuer, which is kind of interesting. And, um, Gary Robertson supplements his income with being in a band, so, um, Gary and Jennifer, she's in real estate. Gary is a architectural designer and building. And they do pretty well. They do a group of vacation rentals. That seems to be something that's catching on is vacation rentals. Wildland Properties seems to do pretty well. They're all about vacation rentals. So, there's niches and opportunities here if you find it and expand it and make it your own. But you gotta get a little creative because it's not something that you can go sign up for and be hired for and go to work in a living wage job here. You gotta kinda make it yourself.

C: Yeah.

D: As an engineer I could do very well here but I'm retired and no good at it so I volunteer.

C: Yeah. Um, well is there anything else either about fishing and maybe the challenges the fishermen face here or anything about Port Orford in general that you want to mention?

D: Well, the port itself does not run on just it's revenue. Excuse me, it's fee revenue. It has a tax base. It has a district. And so everyone in the district pays a fair amount on their taxes, more than they pay for fire and more than they pay for Curry County general, for the reconstruction of the port that happened in, what was it? '97 or '98 I guess. '99. So the reconstruction of the port is still being paid for by district citizens of a....Steve could give you better numbers but, of a \$500,000 budget, the citizens come up with almost 100 of it, so it's about a fifth of the port budget comes from just plain taxes for the, paying for the bond measure that rebuilt the port. And the citizens get a economic engine in the community for that. But that economic engine has had a few hiccups and is liable to have a few more hiccups depending upon what happens to quotas and, you know, the, the crabs, crab pot harv...the, uh, crab season is always dependent upon the amount of dometic acid, which is the, what makes the crab unsafe to eat if there's too much dometic acid. And every year it seems as though the season is delayed or in question or what's, what will be the quotas. So it's not a, it's an industry that relies on science but the science can also drive cycles and the environment can drive cycles. And you never really know what it's gonna be. Every year we have a crab feed here at the Rotary. We never now what we're gonna pay for it. So it makes it, it can be a money, a fundraiser and it can be a bust, it can be a loss depending on what you have to pay for the crab so it makes it kind of hard to do it year after year after because you never know what, what you've got.

C: Anything else? Any final thoughts? You answered a bunch of my questions just in my response.

D: Okay cool.