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Telling the Dory Story

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Paul Hanneman and Jerry Branch maneuver a historic double ender dory into the surf at Cape Kiwanda in July 2012. Pacific City fishermen and women have launched dories through the surf since the early 1900s. Even with modern motors, many dorymen and women still row through the surf just as their fathers and grandfathers did before using motors.
It’s 5 a.m. on a cool July morning. The beach is dark, but near the surf, two men slide from their truck and pull on waders. Within minutes, they’ve launched their dory from the beach and are heading out to sea where Haystack Rock retreats behind them. On the open ocean, the 20-foot craft is tossed about, but resilient – much like the anglers at the helm.

When Linfield College students and professors set out to tell the story of the Pacific City Dory Fleet, they found more than a group of fishermen. They found a way of life.

For more than a century, anglers have pushed their boats into the ocean from Pacific City, an unassuming coastal town of 1,100 off Highway 101. Protected by Cape Kiwanda, the landscape is ideal to launch the small, flat-bottomed boats directly from the beach. In the 1960s and ’70s, that agility enabled the Pacific dory fleet to often bring in more salmon than any other fleet on the Oregon coast. Although major commercial fishing from the dories has given way to more recreational activity, the dory fleet remains a central part of the community.

After four decades of ocean fishing, Richard Bush has reeled in his share of fish stories. There was that time his dog put the truck in gear while they launched the boat, backing the truck and trailer into the ocean. Or the times salmon jumped from the water and hit him in the face.

“That’s how thick they used to be,” said Bush, a Portland drywaller who returns to Pacific City most weekends to fish. Like many of his childhood friends, he moved away from the fishing community but remains connected to its culture.

On this day, he sits at his parents’ kitchen table with longtime friend Jerry Wenzinger. The two have fished together since grade school, most recently in Bush’s boat, the Cricket.

They tell of sharks, and how their predatory scent permeates the wood of the boat, keeping other fish away. They touch on fishing regulations and changes to the industry. They talk of family and fathers. “There’s always a seat in the boat for Dad,” said Bush of his father, Robert, who instilled in him a love of the ocean. When they’re done talking, they share fresh crab from the morning’s catch with a group of Linfield students and faculty who just recorded their stories.

Bush’s interview, and more than 80 others, are included in a two-year oral history project about the Pacific City dory fleet, “Launching Through the Surf: The Dory Fleet of Pacific City.” Armed with cameras, video equipment, microphones, laptops and a healthy dose of curiosity, Linfield students and faculty
In their own words

Students gathered more than 80 interviews from the fishing community. In one excerpt, Noel Knopf ’54 explains the meaning behind the nickname, Ukranian Fleet. “I know a good name. You’re the Ukranian Fleet.” Hear the rest of this story and others at: digitalcommons.linfield.edu/dory
captured audio and video stories, which up until now had only been traded over an early morning cup of coffee before anglers headed out to sea.

The stories are part of an online collection in DigitalCommons@Linfield. They are also the focus of an original theatrical script and production, scholarly papers and poster sessions, a traveling poster exhibit, and a photographic exhibit. The project will be featured in a segment on Oregon Field Guide, produced by Oregon Public Broadcasting. It is a collaboration of the Department of Theatre and Communication Arts, Jereld R. Nicholson Library, the Pacific City Arts Association, the Pacific City Dorymen’s Association and the Linfield Center for the Northwest. The Oregon Arts Commission has supported the play with an Arts Build Communities grant.

The collection of narratives tells the story of the fleet in the words of those who know it best – the anglers and the wives, mothers, husbands, fathers, fish buyers and boat builders. An astounding 15,000 photos, 150 hours of audio and video, and more than 1,500 artifacts have been collected.

Combined, the pieces document a way of life and a culture unique to the Oregon coast, according to Professors Brenda DeVore Marshall, project director, and Ty Marshall, who own a home in Pacific City. Both are members of the Pacific City Arts Association and found a project to combine their favorite entities – Linfield students, Pacific City, communication and the arts.

“Our students have come to understand the importance of storytelling in handing down traditions,” DeVore Marshall said. “We’ve all become a part of Pacific City.”

Hoops in his hip boots

Steve Johnson ’82 grew up on a Pacific City street where there was a boat in most driveways. As a boy, he fished the ocean, washed out the boat, and headed to the nearby Nestucca River for summer steelhead.

“I played hoops in my hip boots,” said Johnson, who played basketball at Linfield. As a part-time fisherman, he made enough money to pay his tuition, catching over 100 Coho salmon the first time out in his own boat, the Stanley Steamer.

“We always went out in the dark,” said Johnson, who majored in business and sociology and is now a financial planner. “Even if the fish weren’t biting, we still came in in the dark. It was a lot of hard work, which was the best thing I learned.”

Like his father and grandfather before him, Johnson spent his summers fishing commercially. His father, JJ, a retired teacher and grand marshal in the 2012 Pacific City Dory Days

Whitney Weber ’14, at left, interviews John and Jan Morgan on their porch overlooking the Nestucca River outside Pacific City. John, a welder, is a member of the Pacific City Dorymen’s Association and designed a boat trailer specifically for dories. At right is a series of historic photos of the dory fleet that include some of the many catches. Before there was a road to the beach, anglers rolled dories down to the surf on a barrel or log. Hundreds of historical artifacts, such as the photos shown here, will be included in the collection found at digitalcommons.linfield.edu/dory.
Ty Marshall, professor of theatre arts, directs Cassidy Davis ‘14, left, and Whitney Weber ‘14 as they prepare for an interview. Following each conversation, students create audio, video and written transcriptions for the archive.

Linfield students record impressions of an onlooker on the beach at Cape Kiwanda. The experience resulted in a number of creative projects for students, including scholarly work. Casee Clark ‘12 wrote a senior seminar paper, “Creating Community: The Dory Fleet of Pacific City,” which she presented at the Northwest Communication Association annual conference.
parade, hoped to instill in his son patience waiting for a bite and the willingness to learn new techniques. “Everyone in this neighborhood will tie on differently,” said JJ. “I’m still learning different tricks.”

**Experiential learning**

The nine students involved in the project (see sidebar on page 13) have become familiar with terms like double ender, cannonball and gaff hook. But more than that, the experience has enabled them to apply critical thinking skills from their classes, while forging meaningful ties with faculty outside the classroom. Whitney Weber ’14 conducted many of the interviews and has honed her public speaking skills. “I have to think on the spot,” said Weber, who has her eye on a career in communication and marketing. “The interview can go in any direction and I have to reel it back in.”

A single interview might touch on a wealth of issues – politics, gender roles, economy, the decline of fisheries. In order
to make the information accessible to the public, Andrea Snyder ’14 works with Professor Kathleen Spring to upload the material to DigitalCommons@Linfield, an online repository. She creates annotated bibliographies and metadata, structured information that lets search engines such as Google find key words and phrases. Snyder kept a blog during the experience, launching-through-the-surf.tumblr.com, and said she has been struck by the sense of community among the fishermen. “I feel like I’m making a difference,” she said. “I strongly believe in what we’re doing. While a specific interview may be about the individual, they’re all connected.”

Their stories came to life on the stage this fall. Professor Jackson Miller and Chris Forrer ’13 wrote Kickin’ Sand and Tellin’ Lies, a fictional tale inspired by the project. The production premiered in the Marshall Theatre in November and was also performed in Pacific City.

“People shared such wonderful stories with us,” said Miller. “It gave us a picture of life in Pacific City and in the dory community that was very vivid and intimate. As a playwright, it’s been a wonderful opportunity.”

Throughout the interviews, Miller and Forrer kept a log of terms and phrases that gave color to the script. Working with Professor Janet Gupton, Caitlyn Olson ’13 gathered dramaturgical content for the play along with Daphne Dosset ’13. Often from the Pacific City library, the two students read extensively about the dories and made the content available for the play.

“Naming conventions are important on a project of this magnitude, so the information will be useful to writers, designers, actors, directors and in DigitalCommons@Linfield as well,” Olson said. Their background research became program notes and gallery displays, and helped the actors and production team to understand the content.

Jenny Layton ’14 was responsible for sound during the interviews and later edited the audio files, removing barking dogs and clicks of the camera shutter. She also served as stage manager for the play. Though she has been involved in theatre since age 9, this is the first time she has had the opportunity to be involved in a production from day one.

“By listening to the conversations, I’ve come to understand how important this community is to them,” she said. “We can do something to preserve that, not just for them but for others outside of Pacific City.”

Keeping history alive

Two decades ago, Pacific City supported a half dozen boat builders. Today, one remains. Professor Ty Marshall is documenting a dory construction process, from its initial framing in April 2012 to its launch into the sea in summer 2013.

“I have a great respect for these people,” he said. “Back in the day, a great number of spin-off industries existed – fish buyers, gas stations, boat builders, fiberglassers, welders – but a lot of them are gone now.”

A relative newcomer to the dory community, welder John Morgan arrived in the 1980s and found a niche designing a trailer...
to launch dories. He described the unique landing process of a dory, which comes to shore with enough speed to carry the boat well onto the beach. The landing can be both dangerous – dories have no brakes – and exhilarating.

“You’re out there on the ocean, going like a bat in the wind, and the next thing you know you can step over the side of the boat onto the beach,” he explained. “It will leave a mark on your memory, and it’s a good one.”

The Linfield group has earned the trust of the community, including Terry Learned, a Pacific City boat builder. With changes to the fishing industry, he said the dory fleet, an important part of Oregon history, could be forgotten. It’s an important aspect of his family history as well. He recalls fishing with his daughter, along with his father and grandfather each in their boats. “That was four generations in three separate dories on one day,” he said.

Paul Hanneman, co-chair of the Pacific City Dorymen’s Association, agrees. “It’s important to talk about our history,” he said. “It has taken a great burden off us to know we have a digital archive that is going to be preserved well into the future and after we’re gone.”

– Laura Davis

Project participants

Brenda DeVore Marshall, professor of theatre and communication arts; Ty Marshall, professor of theatre arts; Janet Gupton, associate professor of theatre arts; Jackson Miller, professor of communication arts; Kathleen Spring, collections management librarian and assistant professor; Casee Clark ’12, communications arts; Cassidy Davis ’14, mass communication; Daphne Dosset ’13, philosophy; Chris Forrer ’13, theatre; Jenny Layton ’14, theatre; Caitlyn Olson ’13, theatre and elementary education; Stephanie Raso ’13, communication arts; Andrea Snyder ’14, creative writing; Whitney Weber ’14, communication arts

Professor Jackson Miller and theatre major Chris Forrer ’13 wrote Kickin’ Sand and Tellin’ Lies, inspired by stories from the project, which was performed at Linfield’s Marshall Theatre in November. Directed by Janet Gupton, associate professor of theatre arts, the production is the story of a young fisherman as he learns respect for the ocean, the dory fleet and fellow anglers.