

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Friday, September 8, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

The Wooden Boat Festival is upon us with its celebration of all things floating on timber frames. What is now the largest wooden boat festival in North America first began in 1978 as a wild idea – a vision of community and a lifestyle of “salt-water hippies” centered on boats and the sea. This sparked a national conversation among those involved in the then nascent wooden boat revival, and was perhaps also the first spark to ignite Port Townsend’s tourism trade. Back then, the paper mill was pretty much the only game in town as far as Port Townsend’s economy was concerned, but with more than 2,000 people traveling to that first festival from all corners of the U.S. and several Canadian provinces, word quickly got out about our lovely locale as a seaworthy destination.

On Thursday, some of the people who have made this community and its maritime traditions what it is today were honored during the Wooden Boat Festival’s Lifetime Achievement Awards. The first of three to receive the award this year was internationally renowned photographer Neil Rabinowitz whose work has been on the covers of 1,200 magazines. Rabinowitz spoke of his years lugging a thousand pounds of gear around shooting super yachts only to find that he “couldn’t find anything virtuous on these super yachts to shoot.” He then thanked the wooden boat community for being so virtuous and welcoming him back into its fold.

Ray Speck was the second to speak after receiving the award for his lifetime of craftsmanship in boatbuilding and passing that knowledge forward as a teacher at the Northwest School of Wooden Boat Building where it is said he “launched a thousand ships,” considering all the students inspired by him to this life. Speck built his first boat in 1968, though it was a rather special case. After leaving the military and needing somewhere to live, he built a houseboat to land himself in Sausalito because he’d heard you could live on the water there without paying rent. Speck attributed this kind of audacity to his father who he said, “didn’t know the words can’t.” And he attributed his lifetime of building to his mother who would always tell him to “do something constructive.”

The final award recipient for the night was Betsy Davis who has built a legacy of optimism and organizational resilience for wooden boat entities in the Pacific Northwest, including as the Executive Director of the Northwest School of Wooden Boat Building. She spoke at length about the lessons learned from wooden boats, particularly from her own 36-foot 1914 classic motorboat *GloryBe* which burned and sank in a marina fire only to be recovered and restored, and can even be found at this year’s Wooden Boat Festival.

Yet another award was recently bequeathed to a local who has done much for a different kind of culture. The City of Port Townsend has crowned Conner Bouchard-Roberts its first official Poet Laureate. Here’s a small taste of Conner reading a little of his work:

[audio clip] “This poem is titled *Untitled Morning Poem*. Listen. Pay attention. Slow, then quick. Bow out and in.”

Conner is a local poet as well as a publisher of the local small-press *Winter* texts, and he even recently opened a bookstore by the same name out of Aldrich’s Market. Born and raised here – though also a world traveler – Conner has put in countless hours of blood, sweat, and ink to uplift poetry locally. I spoke with Conner about what he plans to do with the new role and he is bubbling with possibilities. Of particular interest to me was his thought of place-based poetry monuments, though he noted he wasn’t sure if the city would let him do it. He also wants to breathe life into city council meetings by reading poems during the open comments section, noting

the power of poetry to bring more considered language to hopefully change what can be a stiff environment into one of generative conflict.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.