



## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 12, 2016

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### **Fishermen Will Reel in Fans on September 30 with Verse and Yarns at Bellingham's SeaFeast**

*Bellingham's inaugural celebration of seafood and the fishing life features many of the fishing poets who've made Astoria famous.*

Seattle/Bellingham—When fishermen, fish fanciers and anyone else looking for maritime fun and adventure turn out for the first [Bellingham SeaFeast](#) on September 30, they'll enjoy a literary feast along with sea chanteys, harbor tours and a full day of "Meet the Fisherman" events. At SeaFeast's [FisherPoets-on-Bellingham Bay](#) event, many of the fishing poets, musicians and raconteurs who put Astoria, Oregon, on the map will take the stage in Bellingham for the first time to read and sing their verses, spin their tales, and maybe get the crowd to join in. They'll celebrate an arduous, dangerous life that they wouldn't change for all the desk jobs in the world—and give listeners a privileged window into that life.

"Fishing is fundamental to Pacific Northwest culture," says Penny Dalton, the director of Washington Sea Grant, which is sponsoring FisherPoets-on-Bellingham Bay. "And it's still vital to our economy. But many people living here have not had a chance to experience this lively and entertaining fishing tradition firsthand, and we are pleased to celebrate it through FisherPoets."

The model for FisherPoets-on-Bellingham Bay is the [FisherPoets Gathering](#) in Astoria, which began as a modest effort to warm things up in winter and blossomed into a literary movement and a major attraction. Today, says Buck Meloy, a Bellingham-based fisherman and writer who's performed at all the Astoria gatherings, as many as 100 poets and storytellers now muster each year there. "They're crazy about it down there. More than 1,000 people come every February to listen to the fishermen. Other things have grown around the gathering."

Deborah Granger, a founder and main organizer of Bellingham SeaFeast, recalls that when she went down to check out Astoria's event, "the town was packed. There was no room at the inn." And the movement has spread. The Astoria gathering has spawned similar events in Homer, Cordova and Kodiak, Alaska, and at Seattle's [Pacific Marine](#)

[Expo.](#) And so it was only natural that, when Bellingham set out to host its first SeaFeast, Buck Meloy would invite 28 of his fishing,/writing friends to join in.

“It never occurred to me they’d all say yes,” says Meloy, “but they did.” The result is a packed schedule across three venues with each poet and storyteller getting 15 minutes to deliver his or her very best.

The FisherPoets-on-Bellingham Bay performances kick off at 4 p.m. on Friday, September 30 at the Boundary Bay Brewery and continue till 11. Salts old and young will meanwhile gather to sing sea chanties at the nearby Honey Moon Mead & Cider.

This night of performances will cap a day of workshops led by four seasoned fisher poets at the Fairhaven Library. Each workshop costs \$10. All performances will be free, though the local ales and fish-and-chips accompanying them will not. SeaFeast will continue Saturday, October 1, with net-mending, helicopter rescue and cooking demonstrations, a salmon-grilling tournament, live entertainment, and much more. See the [full schedule here](#).

Much of the verse will recount the dangers, drolleries, and hard-won joys of fishing treacherous northern seas in rhyming couplets and ballads. Patrick Dixon tells his tales in prose, with a novelist’s touch. After getting saved from an at-sea disaster by one fellow skipper and razzed by another, he recounts: “Surprised and tired, I laugh a little too loud and reply, ‘Yeah, and you call yourself a fisherman!’ We tie off to the dock and head for our trucks, exhausted. We’ll clean the boat in the morning, after I hit the liquor store. I owe the skipper of the *Marauder*, my friend, some beer and a bottle of whiskey. Sitting down to drink it later that evening, we’ll both pretend it makes us even.”

One of the most acclaimed poets presenting workshops, [Clemens Starck](#), isn’t a fisherman himself, though he cofounded the FisherPoets Gathering and has close ties to the sea. Starck is a carpenter, which informs these spare lines praised by *The New York Times*:

*I’m thinking how Rembrandt  
over the course of his lifetime created  
nearly a hundred self-portraits, and also I’m thinking  
how one of those pictures  
of everyday life in Holland in the 17th century  
might include  
a carpenter in his workshop filing a saw.  
Some things don’t change.*

That a carpenter has joined the crew points up fishing poetry’s place in a broader resurgence of poetry rooted in ancient occupations that proudly defy the world of office cubicles and digital screens. Fishing and logging poetry movements drew inspiration from the cowboy poets who captured national attention in the 1980s and ’90s. Writer and teacher Erin Fristad, who will perform in Bellingham, sums up the spirit when she recalls her 15 years as a deckhand: “That’s not an experience I’ll ever leave behind. It informs my creative work, my high tolerance for discomfort, my respect for physical labor and a life shaped by the rhythms of the natural world. Fifteen years of fishing is why I talk to strangers in bars; it’s why I still pick up hitchhikers. It’s also why I offer writing workshops for people who have a story to tell, but who don’t necessarily want to earn a degree in writing.”

Whether you work on a boat deck or at a digital screen, you can join the salty fun with FisherPoets-on Bellingham Bay on September 30.

## **FisherPoets-on-Bellingham Bay**

Presented by [Washington Sea Grant](#), Friday, September 30, 2016

### **Performances: Boundary Bay Brewery**

Beer Garden, 4-7:30 p.m.

Mountain Room, 4:15-11 p.m.

**Sea Chanties: Honey Moon Mead & Cider**, 7:30-10:45 p.m.

## **FisherPoets Workshops**

### **Maritime Ballad Writing with John VanAmerongen**

Fairhaven Library, Fireplace Room, 9 a.m.

### **Elements of Storytelling with Moe Bowstern**

Fairhaven Library, Fireplace Room, 11 a.m.

### **How to Write Like a Fisherman (Nothing Fishy About It) with Jon Broderick**

Fairhaven Library, Fireplace Room, 1 p.m.

### **Poetry Out Loud: A Voice Workshop with Clemens Starck**

Fairhaven Library, Northwest Room, 1 p.m.

Washington Sea Grant, based at the University of Washington, provides statewide research, outreach and education services addressing the challenges facing our ocean and coasts. The National Sea Grant College Program is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. [www.wsg.washington.edu](http://www.wsg.washington.edu).