

Q & A WITH CLARE PETRICH

TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.

This month's feature: Port of Tacoma commissioner and local business owner Clare Petrich.



Clare Petrich is a small business owner with strong ties to Tacoma's maritime heritage. A Tacoma native, she runs the Petrich Marine Dock located on the Foss Waterway.

The marine dock has been in the Petrich family, one of the early Dalmatian Slav founding families of Tacoma's boatbuilding industry, for more than 60 years. The Petrichs and their Norse counterparts built the industry when the gasoline engine was added to the wooden boat in 1903 for purse seine salmon fishing. Petrich tuna seine boats fished throughout the Pacific Ocean. One, named the *Tacoma*, founded the Australian tuna industry. Eventually Tacoma became known as the "Fishing Boat Capital of the World."

During the dock's history, the Western Boat Building Corporation launched vessels during World War II and Marine Iron Works built landing gears for the Boeing 737 there.

Petrich is co-founder and chair of the Commencement Bay Maritime Fest and is deeply involved in maritime heritage research.

She was first elected as one of five Port of Tacoma commissioners in 1995. Petrich serves on the Joint Municipal Action Committee, the Local Emergency Planning Committee, Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, the Youth Marine Foundation, the Flood Control Zone District Committee, and the Washington Council on International Trade. She is a past president and current member of the Puget Sound Regional Council's Economic Development District Board. She is also a past president and current secretary for the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle and serves on the boards of the Washington State Trust for Historic Preservation and of Sister Cities International.

Q: What led you to these maritime initiatives?

A: My Gaelic and Croatian ancestors. In our family was the ancestral DNA of sea captains, boat builders, and fishermen. The earliest from Croatia settled in our region because it looked like home. I was always in or near the water--fishing or swimming or kayaking or sailing. I have never lived anywhere away from it. The tide coming in and going out reminds me of the cycle of life. This was deepened when I went to Croatia in 2013 to walk the cobblestone streets of the Dalmatian coast on an ancestral journey to historical archives in Zagreb and to the family home on the island of Hvar ("the island with its arms open to the

sea”) and to Bosnia, the origin of a Petrich migration in the 1550s. I have been learning my own place in history.

Q: What were some critical moments in your work?

A: I would say the recent work by the Seattle and Tacoma port commissions to unify the management of the two ports’ marine cargo terminals and related functions under a single seaport alliance in order to strengthen the Puget Sound gateway and attract more marine cargo for the region. I had lived in Seattle and joined with a Seattle commissioner who had worked at the Port of Tacoma to find a way to keep the discussion moving forward. We complemented each other at the right time for the right challenge.

Another milestone was seeing a picture, while travelling to Taipei, of a dragon boat. I carried it in my wallet for three years while researching the concept. A Chinese man who ran a marina on Hood Canal owned two of them and sold them to me for \$1 each. After trailering them to Tacoma, we made them part of the Tacoma Maritime Festival and formed teams that would challenge each other in informal paddling competitions. Within weeks, a representative from Fuzhou, China, came to Tacoma to invite a Tacoma team to race in Fuzhou. We ended up with 50 participants travelling from our region, including members of the Puyallup Tribe whose heritage is believed to be tied to China through the walking the land bridge that once existed between China and North America. Tacoma eventually mounted a competitive team to enter World Cup dragon boat races in San Francisco and the public is able to experience dragon boat paddling twice a week during the warmer months.

Q: What have been significant challenges along the way?

A: My feeling is that it is rarely anything external but always yourself--your fears and letting questions like, “Do I have enough (time, energy, resources) to do this?” inhibit your progress.

Q: What enables you to bring people together for these efforts?

A: A sense of humor, being born an only child, liking people and what they can accomplish together, and leading by doing.

Q: What does Commencement Bay’s focus need to be going forward?

A: Because of the temperate climate and area beauty we now enjoy, we will need to be ready for the aggressive population growth in our region that will be driven by climate extremes in other parts of North America and the world.