

# Centuries of Fish

## *Seattle's Dynamic High Seas Fishing Fleet*

### *A Documentary Videotape*

During the latter half of the 19th Century, square-rigged sailing ships propelled by the wind and the strength of men's arms left the Seattle waterfront, bound for the Alaska fishing grounds. At the dawn of the 21st Century, factory ships armed with technology worthy of the Starship Enterprise leave the Seattle waterfront, bound for fishing grounds throughout the North Pacific. For well over 100 years, this Northwest city has been arguably the world's greatest fishing port and the hub of an industry that has played a surprisingly important role in shaping the culture and economy of the Pacific Northwest region. *Centuries of Fish* is a documentary videotape that tells the story of an industry that operates largely out of sight and out of the minds of those engaged in shoreside pursuits. For those who know the sea, however, this industry, the last enterprise in the modern world in which men and women hunt a product in the wild, is an enduring source of sustenance and fascination.

The Eighth Title In  
**The Thorstenson-Sabella Series**  
Produced by  
**John Sabella & Associates, Inc.**  
In conjunction with  
**The Maritime Heritage Foundation**

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# The Thorstenson-Sabella Collection

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**B**ob Thorstenson, founder of Icicle Seafoods Corporation and the fishing industry's favorite son, has devoted his retirement to documenting the history of an enterprise that, as much as any other, has shaped the Pacific Northwest and Alaska region. A history graduate of the University of Washington, Thorstenson sits on the boards of directors of several regional museums. *Young people don't want to look at old bones*, he tells his colleagues. In Thorstenson's mind, today's youth prefer the livelier medium of videotape, and the fruits of his vision now include the eight documentary videotapes that comprise one component of *The Thorstenson-Sabella Collection*:

*Centuries of Fish*

*Sockeye and the Age of Sail*

*The Great Age of Salmon*

*The Days of Salmon Traps & Fish Pirates*

*The Longline Pioneers*

*Pots of Gold: The Profit & The Sorrow*

*The Salmon Capital of the World*

*Petersburg: The Town that Fish Built*

**A**long with the edited documentaries, *The Thorstenson-Sabella Collection* includes a substantial archive of historic film and photography transferred to professional videotape stock. In the case of the brittle old film, some of which dates back to the early 1920s,

the effort has preserved priceless glimpses of industry and regional history.

**T**he third component of *The Thorstenson-Sabella Collection* are dozens of professionally recorded on-camera interviews with the pioneers who lived the bygone era. These individuals, whose frontier experiences seem almost inconceivable in the sanitized atmosphere of the 21st Century, are a diminishing resource. More than one of the old salts who has faced our cameras has *crossed the bar* since he or she told us their tales, and we are working with some urgency to record as many more interviews as possible. Only a fraction of the interview content has survived the editing process so that it appears in the documentary programs. The remainder represents a substantial audiovisual history of this industry and this corner of the globe.

**P**roduction of *Centuries of Fish* has added significantly to all three components of the historic record represented by *The Thorstenson-Sabella Collection*. As with the earlier documentaries, the program has been produced by Seattle writer-producer John Sabella. The project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Maritime Heritage Foundation, which will benefit from home cassette sales and broadcast revenues. As the emerging Maritime Heritage Center takes form at the south end of Lake Union, the documentary will be a powerful tool for educating the public about the maritime realm.

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