

# Documentary Videotape Recreates History of Pacific Salmon Industry

*The Great Age of Salmon & the PAF* brings to life a fascinating era in the history of commercial fishing at the last frontier. Featuring film footage dating back to 1926, narrated by industry pioneer Stan Tarrant, *The Great Age of Salmon & the PAF* is the story of the early fishing industry in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, and of the Pacific American Fisheries Company of Bellingham.

Conceived by retired industry executive Bob Thorstenson, founder of Icicle Seafoods Corporation, the half-hour documentary was financed primarily by the major Seattle-based salmon packing companies. It treats the viewer to rare scenes like these:

- *Life aboard 1920s-era windjammers enroute to Alaska, laden with the men, equipment, supplies and dreams required to build and operate canneries in the wilderness;*
- *The grueling routines of Bristol Bay sailboat fishermen who lived and worked, ate and slept aboard open boats with only the wind and the strength in their arms to propel them and to haul their gear.*
- *The construction and operation of salmon traps, and a fish-eye view of the interiors;*
- *Setting and hauling gear aboard early purse seiners;*
- *The labors of set net fishermen working their beach sites;*
- *A close-up tour of the canning lines in World War II-era canneries.*

Produced in conjunction with the Whatcom Museum of History and Art of Bellingham, Washington, the program relies on old films and still photographs, plus the insights of Thorstenson and Tarrant, the former PAF president whose first trip to work in an Alaska cannery occurred in 1926!

It is the voice of Tarrant, the brilliant octogenarian who lived the era depicted in the videotape, that makes the historical imagery come alive. A 35-year veteran of the salmon canning industry, Tarrant rose through the ranks from bookkeeper to president of the once-mighty PAF, a company that operated the world's largest salmon cannery in Bellingham and some 30 production sites in Alaska.

His extemporaneous, remarkably precise descriptions of cannery life from the 1920s through the introduction of power boats to Bristol Bay in 1951 paint an oral portrait of the bygone age.

## **JOHN SABELLA & ASSOCIATES**

I N C O R P O R A T E D

190 W. Uncas Road, Port Townsend, WA 98368 • info@johnsabella.com • www.johnsabella.com  
Phone: 360-379-1668 • Fax: 360-379-5148 • Toll Free: 1-888-719-4099

Thorstenson, a history buff and patron of numerous museums in Washington State and Alaska, cites the program as the first in a series of historical videotapes he plans to make about the early fishing industry and other aspects of life in the region.

“Not only have we made a fine documentary,” Thorstenson says of the *The Great Age of Salmon & the PAF*, “we’ve preserved a priceless slice of fishing industry history. We uncovered the old films in people’s attics and basements—all over the place. Some of them were literally falling apart, but by transferring them to broadcast-quality videotape, we’ve created an archive of historical material that can be used to teach future generations about a way of life that’s gone now.

“Kids today don’t want to go to a museum and look at old bones. If we’re going to make history meaningful to them, we have to provide resources in the media they respond to, like videotape.”

Program sponsors included Arrowac Fisheries, Bellingham Cold Storage, Graham & Dunn attorneys, Icicle Seafoods, Nelbro Packing Co., Norquest Seafoods, Peter Pan Seafoods, Sitka Sound Seafoods, Trident Seafoods and Wards Cove Packing Company.

*The Great Age of Salmon & the PAF* is a show history buffs, maritime enthusiasts and fishermen will definitely want to add to their video collections! Produced by John Sabella & Associates, Inc.

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