

Remembering Ron Thomas

1945 – 2019

by Brian Robbins

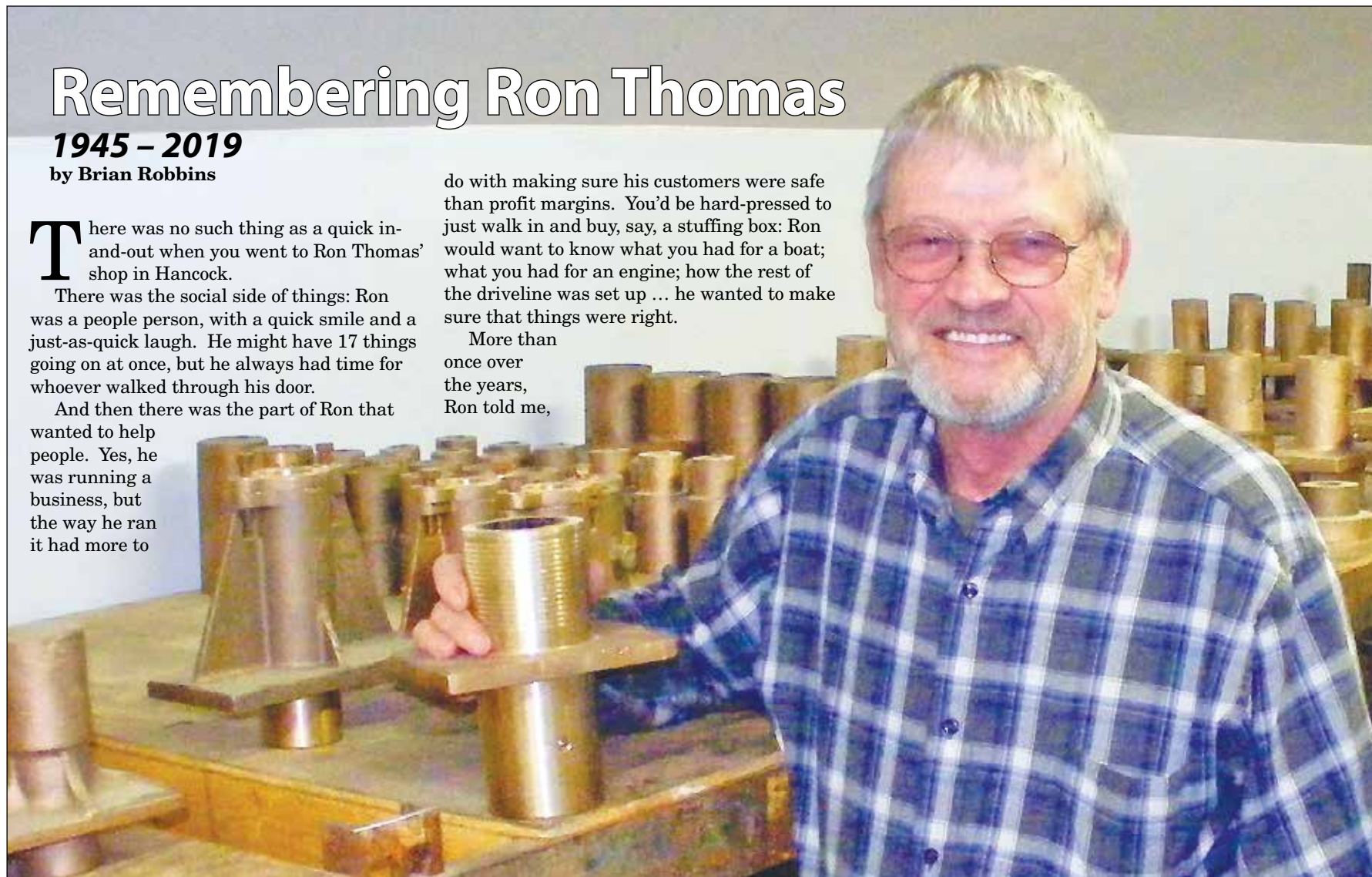
There was no such thing as a quick in-and-out when you went to Ron Thomas' shop in Hancock.

There was the social side of things: Ron was a people person, with a quick smile and a just-as-quick laugh. He might have 17 things going on at once, but he always had time for whoever walked through his door.

And then there was the part of Ron that wanted to help people. Yes, he was running a business, but the way he ran it had more to

do with making sure his customers were safe than profit margins. You'd be hard-pressed to just walk in and buy, say, a stuffing box: Ron would want to know what you had for a boat; what you had for an engine; how the rest of the driveline was set up ... he wanted to make sure that things were right.

More than once over the years, Ron told me,



"You never want to lose touch with your customers. If you listen to them, you'll learn."

The bottom line was, Ron never took the business of underwater hardware lightly.

Ron Thomas didn't grow up around the ocean; he spent his childhood up in Northern Maine, in fact – and developed his strong work ethic doing farm chores and cutting wood.

Soon after graduating from Foxcroft Academy in 1964, Ron moved to Connecticut to explore job opportunities ... and in the process, discovered his true passion.

The first time Ron walked into a machine shop and saw a metal lathe at work he was smitten. His aptitude for math and desire to learn helped him quickly master the craft of machining.

Ron returned home to Maine with his new talents and spent a few years working for others; the handwriting was on the wall, however ... and he eventually opened his own shop.

Founded in 1973, Ron's company was a well-established precision machine tool manufacturer when he entered the marine hardware world full-time in 2003. The acquisition of the former Waterline Marine line of underwater hardware – including stuffing boxes and stern bearing housings – gave Ron a place to start on Day One.

By Day Two, he was working on ways to improve the line.

"When Ron got involved in

driveline components, it really changed things for the better," Bruce Grindal of H&H Marine Inc. in Steuben, ME told me a few years ago. "One of the first things he did was to modify the long-time traditional inside stuffing box to accept a cutless bearing. Finally, someone was offering an easy way to properly support the forward end of a propeller shaft when needed – with a rugged, simple, good-looking rig that you could install and not worry about."

"When we first got into marine hardware, it seemed like there had been big changes on the engine

end of the driveline world with the trend towards higher horsepower packages," Ron told me back in 2010. "But things had pretty much stayed the same back aft with the packing boxes and bearing housings. We recognized a need to keep up with the times for *safety's* sake, as much as anything."

The idea of "the right stuff for the application" was something that Ron was always passionate about, as any of his customers will attest.

Brian Farrin of Farrin's Boatshop in Walpole, ME, summed it up as well as anyone in a discussion we had

about Ron once: "Ron wanted to know all he could about the application and how his equipment was going to be used. He was never just an 'order-taker' – he cared about his customers and stood behind his work."

In Ron Thomas' mind, there was no other way to approach things: "The marine world is no place to be complacent," he said, "especially when it comes to hardware below the waterline. People's lives are at stake and any manufacturer should make that their first consideration."

And there was the humor – and oh my Lord ... nobody could make you laugh like Ron Thomas. And nobody laughed any harder than Ron himself – usually at himself.

After years of working hard to develop his business (and battling some serious health issues), Ron and his wife Karen made the decision to sell R.E. Thomas Marine Hardware in 2018. New owner Ben Dinsmore took over with longtime shop manager Mike Newbert staying on to keep things running in the "Ronnie tradition."

The couple finally had a chance to settle back a little and enjoy themselves ... but that ended tragically on July 1.

Ironically, the man who dedicated himself to keeping others safe on the water died while trying to retrieve his outboard when it went adrift on Tunk Lake.

There will never be another Ron Thomas. ■



Brian Robbins photos

Ron and wife Karen shortly before retiring in 2018.

Commercial Fishing Captains We want your feedback!

Earn up to \$100

The Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety, in partnership with Johns Hopkins University and UMass Amherst, is studying how fishing vessel operators use mobile apps to help with safety issues.

Participants will complete one or two questionnaires about their fishing experience, safety concerns, and use of mobile apps. Some participants will be asked to try a specific mobile app. Each questionnaire takes about 30 minutes. Participants will receive a \$50 gift card for each questionnaire completed.

Eligible participants are commercial fishing vessel captains fluent in English who fish with a crew and who have an iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, or an Android phone or tablet.



Interested?

Call or text us at
508-441-4728

or register online at
is.gd/fishingapps

HYDRO-SLAVE

SAME DAY SERVICE

"THINKING OF BUILDING A NEW BOAT?"
LET US QUOTE YOU ON A POWER STEERING OR A POT HAULER.



HAULERS AVAILABLE 8" TO 17"

- ALUMINUM BACKPLATE
- POLISHED STAINLESS BACKPLATE
- ALL STAINLESS HARDWARE



16" SPOKED WHEEL

- BRONZE
- CHROME



POWER STEERING AVAILABLE IN 5 CLASSES

- UP TO 120 FEET
- STAINLESS QUADRANT ASSEMBLIES
- STAINLESS HELMS



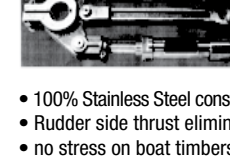
DUAL RAM QUADRANT ASSEMBLY



ELECTRIC CLUTCHES



HIGH EFFICIENCY VANE PUMP
\$544.70



5.5 HP HONDA POWER UNIT

- 11GPM @ 1500 PSI 2 Stage Pump
- Light, Versatile and Portable

OUR NEW GENERATION SUPER BLOCKS

- 4" Low LIP and HI LIP
- 5" Low LIP and HI LIP
- 2000 lb. Capacity



- This unit will power 10" and 12" and 14" Haulers
- Ideal for outboards and other small boats
- Log Splitter



- Sealed tapered roller bearings
- Aluminum Sheaves
- Stainless Sheaves

WORLD'S LARGEST POT HAULER MFG. FOR OVER 40 YEARS

Call 1-800-747-7550 for more information • Or visit us on the internet: www.midcoast.com/~marinhyd/
MARINE HYDRAULIC ENGINEERING
17 Gordon Drive • Rockland, Maine • Fax: 207-594-9721
Email: marinhyd@midcoast.com



We are proud to announce the relaunch of the Willis Beal model line!

The hulls that Beals Island designer Willis Beal built for RP Boats in the 1990s had a reputation for roominess, speed and seaworthiness. The original molds were lost when RP was destroyed in a fire in 2010, but Taylorored Boats is bringing them back to life ... bigger and better than before! The first step was to use the 40' Designer's Daughter (owned by Willis' son-in-law Travis Beal) as a plug for a new mold that will produce three different models:

40' • 42' • 44' all w/widths from **15'3" to 17'6"**

All three models have a draft of 4'6" • Will swing up to a 36" propeller • Molded fiberglass tops w/ Divinycell core

FROM HULLS TO KITS TO ANY STAGE OF COMPLETION
ALSO: CUSTOM FINISHING OF THE HULL OF YOUR CHOICE



56 East Side Rd,
Addison, ME 04606
(207) 483-4717
(207) 263-5412
taylororedboats@hotmail.com

Two original RP 40s: Butterfly Kisses (left) and the Designer's Daughter at right, which was used as a plug for our brand-new mold. Future models include the Willis Beal 35/38 and the 31.

