

Remembering Bob Fitzsimmons

By Lori Froehlich

Klickitat PUD Line Superintendent Robert Peter Fitzsimmons, (“Bob” or “Fitz”) died May 18 at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. He was 67.

Born January 6, 1946, to June and Pete Fitzsimmons of Oroville, California, Bob moved with his mother, stepfather and younger brother Richard to Prineville, Oregon, in 1957, when he was in the seventh grade. Known as Bobby Dunn,



he was a member of the graduating class of 1963 from Crook County High School in Prineville. After graduation he turned down a football scholarship to Boise State, took back the last name of Fitzsimmons and moved to California to follow in his father’s footsteps.

In 1964, Bob began his journey to become a lineman with the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. of Fresno, California, where his father was the foreman of a line crew. Upon completion of his apprenticeship, he moved back to Oregon, where he was a timber faller for a year. He began working for the Condon office of Columbia Basin Electric Co-op on January 2, 1970.

Bob once said of his profession, “I am more worried about being hit by a car than I am about working with high voltage.”

Linemen work in the worst weather conditions imaginable. While at Columbia Basin, Bob worked through some of the most infamous ice storms in the Condon area.

“The temperature was below zero, and the wind was blowing hard,” he said. “I would barely get to the top of the pole when my hands would become numb, even though I was wearing insulated gloves. Lineman Joe Nix and I could only work for a few minutes at a time, and then we would have to come down and get in the pickup to get warm. I think that is the coldest I have ever been. I hate ice storms. I’ll take summer any day.”

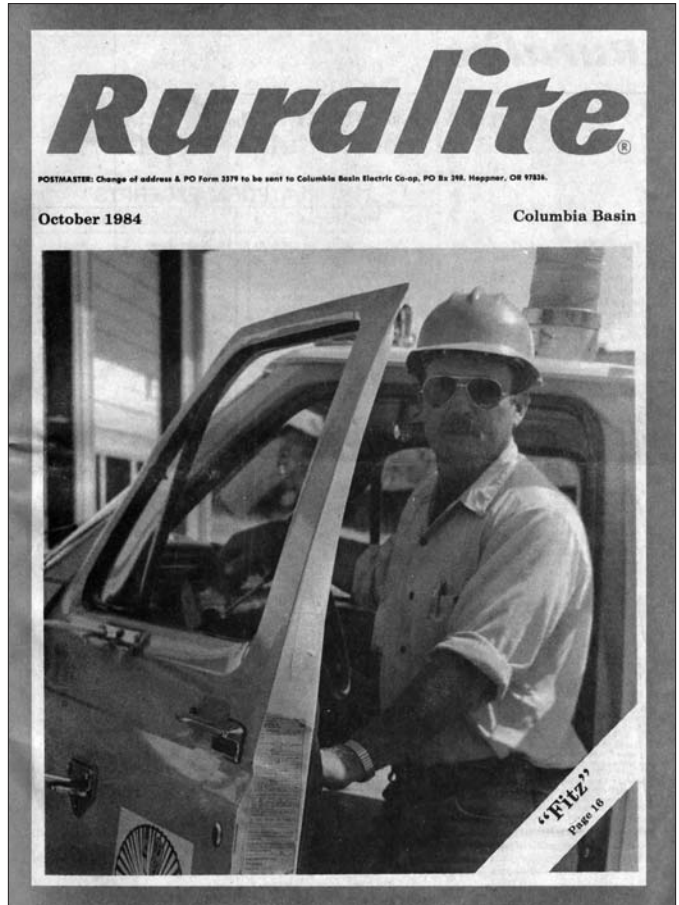
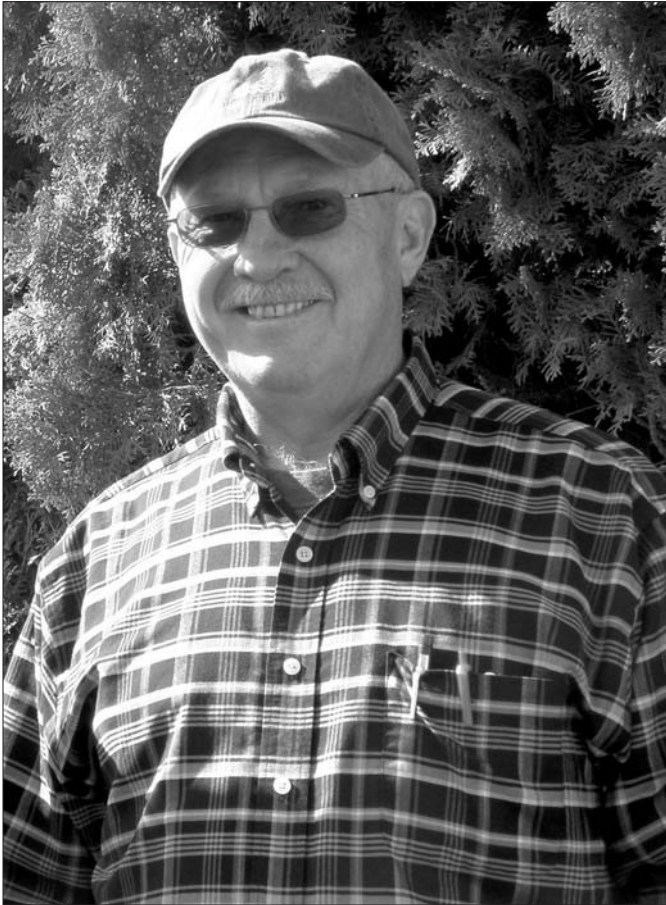
Bob spent more than 30 years dedicated to keeping the power on for the residents of Gilliam and Wheeler counties.

On May 14, 1996, Bob married the love of his life, Sharon Coleman, in Shaniko, Oregon. They made their home in Fossil, Oregon, for several years before relocating to Goldendale in 2001 following his retirement from Columbia Basin.

Bob spent his life outdoors and was an avid sportsman. His happiest times were spent hunting, fishing and spending time with family and friends. He also enjoyed guiding fishing trips, meeting new people and following his beloved Notre Dame Fighting Irish. He was a gifted woodworker and spent countless hours in his shop creating treasures that will long be cherished by family and friends.

Always ready to lend a helping hand to neighbors and friends, Bob was involved in the community and particularly enjoyed working with kids. He was a devoted father and was always there for his family—whether coaching his son’s baseball team, teaching hunters’ safety courses to the kids of the area, or simply lending an ear and extending much-needed advice. His children and grandchildren were the pride of his life.

Bob became a master mason in May 1984 and was a member of the Condon Elks Lodge 1869, where he served as exalted ruler in 1976 and 1977. He was also a member of the



Opposite page, Bob Fitzsimmons performs annual pole-top training in July 2008. Above left, Bob shows his familiar smile in 2009 when he was promoted to line superintendent. Above right, Bob was featured on the cover of Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative's October 1984 issue of Ruralite.

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 125, Oregon Hunters Association, National Rifle Association and Northwest Steelheaders Association.

On July 1, 2001, Bob began working at Klickitat PUD as a journeyman lineman on the Goldendale crew. He later became serviceman and held the position of line superintendent at the time of his death.

Throughout Bob's career at Klickitat PUD he made many friends. Everybody on the crews and in the office loved Bob. He had a kind heart, loved to play practical jokes, and always had a great smile and story to share. Anyone who rode in the passenger seat of his truck quickly discovered he had a truck full of snacks, from Red Vines licorice to trail mix, that he was glad to share. He had a tendency to take younger coworkers under his wing and offer words of wisdom.

More than once this line about Bob has been told: "For a

guy who gives the impression of having a rough exterior, he has a heart of gold."

He was preceded in death by his father, Pete, and his brother, Richard Dunn. He is survived by his wife, Sharon, of Goldendale; mother, June Dunn Guimont, of Woodburn, Oregon; son, Aaron (Chris) Fitzsimmons of Condon, Oregon; daughters Jeanine (Rob) Conlee of The Dalles, Oregon, and Shannon (Vince) Vanoss of Leonardtown, Maryland; grandchildren, Marnie, Derek, Coby, Aleks and Stefan; sister-in-law, Carolyn Reeves of Prineville, Oregon; sister, Debra Bowar of Woodburn, Oregon; brother, Richard Fitzsimmons of Madera, California; and niece, Lindsey Dunn of Portland.

Klickitat PUD will remember Bob as not only a coworker, but as a friend and member of the PUD family, and take comfort in knowing he is on his ultimate hunting and fishing trip. ■