



Robert Harold Holcomb

October 9, 1924 - February 24, 2015

Bob Holcomb, a second-generation native Oregonian born Oct. 9, 1924, in Woodburn, died Feb. 24, 2015, in Corvallis.

He was born to Fred W. Holcomb and Happy Mable Holcomb, who preceded him in death.

Immediately after graduation from Toledo High School, Bob volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps and became a bombardier officer in a B-24 Heavy Bombardment Group of the 15th Air Force in Italy during World War II. That 376th Bomb Group became the most decorated bomb group in World War II, resulting from its early actions on the bombing raids involving the Nazi oil complexes at Ploesti, Romania.

After Bob's 17th mission, his plane was one of 30 bombers shot down in a raid over Linz, Austria, and was officially listed as missing in action until the end of the war. His plane crash landed behind Russian lines, in Hungary, and he lived with the Russian Army until the end of the European conflict.

At war's end, he returned home to receive both his Bachelor of Science and optometry degrees from Pacific University, and entered private practice in Corvallis for 41 years.

While at Pacific University, he was student body president in 1949 — the centennial year of the founding of PU. And as a result, he was asked to represent the student body at the Forest Grove Rotary Club Luncheons for the entire year; he has been associated with Rotary ever since. He was a member of Blue Key Honor Society, a national honorary fraternity. He was listed in Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities, 1949.

He established his optometry practice in Corvallis in 1951, retiring in 1992.

In 1963 he was awarded the Oregon Optometric Associations President's Award for "Outstanding work for Optometry in many fields of endeavor." He was elected president of the Oregon Optometric Association for 1980-81.

He served as Exalted Ruler of the Elks Lodge in 1956-57 and was designated Elk of the Decade when he completed his year as chairman of the trustees, for his work involving community service.

He joined the Corvallis Rotary Club in 1958 and served that club as president in 1980-81. He was nominated to the board of directors of the newly created Corvallis Rotary Club's Benton County Foundation (Benton County Community Fund) to fund youth activities in Benton County, and served as its fifth president, for 1969-70.

As a member of the Corvallis Masonic Lodge and Al Kader Shrine Temple, he was an active member of the Mary's Peak Trek. During its years of operation, he helped to raise over \$1 million for the Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children and their burn centers. He served as trek chairman during the 1970s.

Bob was nominated and elected a district governor of Rotary International in 1986. During that year he became a member of a worldwide Rotary district governors committee whose purpose was to raise \$120 million to eradicate

polio. He was the first to establish, in his district, a foundation donation dinner project that netted \$164,000. He represented the president of Rotary International at three international district conferences (combined U.S. and Canadian districts) and two U.S. districts.

He was an original member of the Northwest Regional Rotary President-Elect Training Seminar, which now is the largest annual training seminar in the Rotary world, as a participant, instructor, keynote speaker and chairman, in 1990. As a result he helped train thousands of incoming Rotary club presidents-elect from Alaska, Western Canada and the U.S. Northwest on the art of leadership.

In 1997, he laid the foundation for organizing a 14-day eye clinic in Ecuador. Optometrists wrote prescriptions for 1,680 people, and fitted 1,330 pairs of glasses. Two surgeons performed surgery on 122 patients, 110 of those for cataracts.

In 2001 Bob led his own club members to raise over \$100,000 for the team to make its third trip to Ecuador, and was appointed to be the area coordinator for President Devlyn's Avoidance of Blindness Task Force, which is in touch with every Rotary club in the United States and Canada.

Bob's alma mater, PU, honored him with its 1998 Alumni Distinguished Service Award, in recognition of distinguished and unselfish service to humanity.

Retiring from his practice in 1992, he also retired as a director on the board of Pacific Continental Bank after 28 years.

As an avid Western American history buff, he gave more than 500

presentations to business and professional groups in the three Western states on “The Winning of the West and the Humor of It All.”

In 2001 Bob completed a term as vice president of the Oregon Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, helping prepare the country for the then-upcoming celebration of the 200th anniversary of that historic expedition.

He was elected to represent District 5110 as a delegate to the nominating committee to select the next member of the R.I. Board of Directors from Zone 23. In May 2001, he represented Dr. Frank Devlyn at District 7610’s conference in Richmond, Virginia.

Bob married Wilfreda (Billie) Shepherd in 1945 in Vancouver, Washington; they would have celebrated their 70th anniversary this August. Bob and Billie both are multiple Paul Harris Fellows in Rotary International.

In recent years, Bob and Billie established the Bob and Billie Holcomb Family Youth Award, a scholarship through the Boys & Girls Club of Corvallis, to be given to a deserving young student who exemplifies leadership and community service.

In 2009, Bob received a surprise phone call. In 1945, when he had been shot down in Hungary, a 13-year-old boy, Gabe Pall, had talked with him. Dad had given him some candy and gum, and told him to look him up if he ever got to the U.S.

It had taken Gabe 12 years to escape from Russian-controlled Hungary and then get to the U.S. It took him 64 years to find Bob. They were able to have a reunion in 2010.

Bob is survived by his wife, Billie; son, Larry Holcomb (Karen); daughter,

Linda Holcomb-Bryant (Patrick); two grandsons, Ryan Snook (Traci) and Aaron Snook; one great-grandson, Joshua Cantrell; and his brother, Fred “Jack” Holcomb.

Our family wishes to extend our thanks and gratitude to Benton Hospice Service and New Horizons In-Home Care for their excellent care.

A celebration of life will take place at 1:30 p.m. March 10 at the Corvallis Elks Lodge, 1400 N.W. Ninth St., Corvallis.

Please make donations to Benton Hospice Service or the Boys & Girls Club of Corvallis in lieu of flowers.

Tribute Wall

DM

“ *I first met Bob in the mid 70's. Later I heard him speak, and he could captivate an audience like no one else. Bob was a wonderful human being.*

David McCreedy

David McCreedy - February 28, 2015 at 09:43 AM