A man for all seasons

By Roger Fitzgerald

Roger Fitzgerald has been covering the Alaska fishing industry since 1976.

He was in rare form. That is to say, he was himself. Nothing missing but his body, but the closer I got to him the better he looked. In fact, before it was over it seemed like he was holding me up more than I was him, buoyed by a circle of friends who couldn't get closer if they sat on his lap.

It was a Toast & Roast for Jim Beaton, a fisherman among fishermen, a man among men, a dear friend to many of us in the room and far beyond it. At the Hotel Andra in downtown Seattle after the close of Pacific Marine Expo. Many were invited, and many came, all in all about 100 guests.

Who is Jim Beaton? As one young fellow stood up and said, “I haven't known him for long, but he's the coolest guy I ever met!” Most of us there knew him for a long time — for me, back to when I was a rookie reporter for the Alaska Fisherman's Journal covering Board of Fisheries meetings in Anchorage from the '70s to the early '80s, when Nick Szabo was chairing the meetings (who was there to deliver one of the roasts. Needless to say, he was no match for Beaton's quick wit and sharp memory. No one was).

He did it all. Wrestled with Ken Kesey at the University of Oregon where he won the NCAA championship. But he didn't hang around campus for long. From Oregon he headed for Alaska, where he became a major player in the Alaska fishing industry (Board of Fisheries, UFA, adviser on the North Pacific Council). Everyone was there: a veritable Who's Who in the Alaska Fishing Industry. A crowd of more than 100 (left) gathered after the close of Pacific Marine Expo to toast their dear friend and colleague.

The last time I heard of an event that was said to be an industry game changer for Alaska salmon was at one of our local fishermen's meetings back in the early '70s. We heard there were people in certain parts of the world who had figured out how to farm raise salmon and that it would have an effect on the world markets for salmon and perhaps consume much of Alaska's market share. Back then this was quite unfathomable to many in our fisheries up here but at the same time, put us on point.

I don’t think I have to inform anyone of the effect the farmed salmon industry has had on markets on a global scale. For the most part it has gotten more people in the world consuming salmon, fulfilling the demand for which can be viewed as a good thing and has changed how many markets now look at