

Sculptor creates bronze of Major General Eldon Bargewell

Part II - Another Harborite — Rip Caswell — from Montesano, world-renowned for his art

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Editor's note: *This is the second of a two-part series titled *The Soldier and the Sculptor*. Part I featured war hero Major General Eldon Bargewell and was published in the Thursday edition of *The Daily World*. The story is timely as a new plaza in a triangle park in Hoquiam will be the site of a bronze statue dedication May 20.*



The sculptor for the Major General Eldon Bargewell memorial is one of the most accomplished bronze sculptors in America. Rip Caswell creates his sculptures in his studio in Wood Village, Oregon, with a gallery in nearby Troutdale. If you want to see bronze sculptures like you've never seen before, his gallery is the place to go.

There is an interesting back story on how the sculptor was chosen. As ideas began to focus, a bronze statue was discussed, and I recalled nationally acclaimed bronze sculptor Rip Caswell from Montesano. Rip was one of three sculptors asked by the MG Eldon Bargewell Committee to submit proposals, and was delighted to have an opportunity to be considered for a major sculpture in what he refers to as his "hometown community."

Rip was originally called to my attention by his high school classmate, Karen McDonald. On her recommendation I wrote a story on Rip published in *The Daily World* on September 2, 2007. Much of the following is from that story.

Rip's family moved to Montesano when he was in the 6th grade, and he graduated from Montesano High School in 1981. The family lived in a small house at the end of Schafer Boom Road, which was the old "boom shack" converted to a home by his father.

Rip learned his artistic skills while in Montesano, first learning taxidermy, doing work for local hunters. With his parent's encouragement Rip pursued his interest in taxidermy, and understudied with the renowned taxidermist Bill Lancaster of Beaver Creek, Oregon.

In 1992 the Caswell Gallery opened in Troutdale, Oregon. As his recognition grows, so do the requests for his art. His life size bronze wildlife sculptures have become centerpieces for large developments, homes, museums, and major parks. Rip also creates a wide array of bronze sculptures, including several of military and other notables.

On June 25, 2007, the Tom McCall Memorial Committee, a group formed by former political associates and environmental groups, announced the commission of a "larger-than-life" bronze sculpture to honor former Governor Tom McCall of Oregon, who was known for his "wide-ranging environmental achievements." It's a ten foot tall likeness of Governor McCall fishing for steelhead in Salem's Riverfront Park.

In 2008 Rip completed a sculpture commissioned by friends and classmates of U.S. Army Pfc. Thomas Tucker of Madras, Oregon, who was abducted and killed while on patrol in Iraq in June 2006. The statue shows Pfc. Tucker reaching out to aid an Iraqi citizen. In 2013 Caswell created an eleven foot tall bronze statue of Admiral Nimitz, which is erected at the Pearl Harbor Memorial in Honolulu.

Caswell's wildlife sculptures have earned him a reputation as one of the leading authorities in wildlife art. In 2008 a nationally televised PBS show featured Rip as he created his sculptures. In the program by Producer Neil Rogers titled "Discover the Wild", Rogers is attributed as saying that "he has never seen a sculptor in the United States that captures the emotion, spirit, and anatomy of an animal as well as Rip Caswell." A video of the program can be viewed on www.caswellsculpture.com

Rip's talent is very evident, however, he will tell you that without the mentorship of three very special people in Montesano, his life wouldn't be the same today.

He turned out for the wrestling team at Montesano High School, and at first had no self confidence, losing nearly every match. Kenichi Kanno was the wrestling coach and art instructor. Kenichi had been an All-American Wrestler at Grays Harbor Community College, and took a real interest in Rip, in particular working on his self confidence. Rip vividly recalls the defining moment in one match where he was about to be pinned, and based on what Kenichi had been telling him, "I thought. What if I really tried?" He added, "At that moment I was able to get away from the opponent, and win the match."

While in school, Rip began working on the Peterson Ranch for the Gib and Botch Peterson families. The ranch was near the Caswell home, and it was Gib and Botch who instilled a strong work ethic within him. Rip gets very thoughtful when telling, "They were truly grounded in their work ethic and philosophy of hard work." He said the Petersons taught him "to dedicate yourself to whatever you're doing with your whole heart. Whether it's shoveling manure, bailing hay, bucking logs, or as a mechanic's helper."

As a youth Rip managed the ranch for four years, and about a year after high school graduation, Kenichi Kanno came out to the farm to visit him. Kenichi understood that Rip really enjoyed working on the farm, but knew his art and taxidermy skills should be put to use. Rip remembers the exact words Kanno told him that day. "Rip what are you doing? You can achieve much more than this." He recalled Kenichi then saying "You can do better than this." And then repeating "You can do better than this. You can achieve great things."

Caswell acknowledges, "this was the seed" that changed his direction. And, because of his interest in wildlife and the outdoors, he began his pursuit of taxidermy and wildlife sculptures. Rip remembers coming back home to Montesano for Kenichi's funeral and wishing that his former art instructor, wrestling coach and mentor could have seen what his student had been able to accomplish because of the inspiration of Kenichi Kanno.

Although he lives and works in the Troutdale area, he says he "always considers Montesano his home." Moreover, he considers Kenichi, Gib, and Botch as the cornerstones for whatever success he has. After reading *The Harbor – a Culture of Success* at the website www.cultureofsuccess.com he believes "the foundation experienced on the Harbor played a role in whatever success the people listed have." "Growing up in Grays Harbor instills common sense, responsibility, and grounds you." And finally, "In a small community you can't get away with anything. Everyone knows you, and you become accountable. There is also a great sense of loyalty, and a spirit of camaraderie." "My roots,

and the core of who I am, were formed by the Harbor.”

A trip to the Caswell Gallery in Troutdale will be worth your while, but if you can't make the journey, at least take a look at his website at www.caswellsculpture.com. You'll be impressed with the works of this renowned artist, who calls the Harbor his home. Rip is thrilled to be the selected sculptor of the Major General Eldon Bargewell statue.

The committee believes you will be thoroughly impressed by the accomplishments of both the Harbor native son who the statue honors, and the Harbor native son who created the bronze statue.

We hope see you in Hoquiam for the dedication on Armed Forces Day, May 20, 2023.



Workers install the base for the bronze sculpture of Major General Eldon Bargewell in Hoquiam

The bronze sculpture of Major General Eldon Bargewell will be dedicated in Hoquiam on Armed Forces Day, Saturday, May 20.

