



GUALALA COMMUNITY CENTER

Serve. Support. Celebrate.

Volunteer Corner

The Gualala Community Center Board of Directors shines a spotlight on Rick O'Neil, a long time Gualala resident, community business owner, and volunteer.

Early Life and Family Roots

Rick O'Neil was born in Morton, WA in 1950 to Earnest and Evelyne O'Neil. He was named after his paternal uncle, Richard. Rick has an older brother, Mike, who lives in Arizona, a younger brother, Steve, and a younger sister, Rebecca, who both live in Gualala. Rick's dad was a "timber faller" and he describes his mother as "an exceptional mom and great baker who made the local wedding cakes until the new bakeries came to the area." In 1953, Rick's family moved to Anchor Bay and his dad went to work for Weyerhaeuser. They then built their home in Gualala.

Service and Starting a Career

After finishing high school in Pt. Arena, both Rick and his brother, Mike, enlisted in the U.S. Air Force—Rick learned the plumbing trade and Mike learned diesel mechanics. After Rick returned from the service, his dad called Tom Enos at Tom's Plumbing about Rick's training in the Air Force. Rick tells the story that, "One morning, Tom came to the O'Neil house at 10:00am and asked for me. He told me that he had a job for me. I replied, 'I'll be there at 7:00 tomorrow morning.' Tom told me, 'The job offer was for right now and that if you want to work for Tom's Plumbing, you need to get out of bed and get dressed in your work clothes.'"

Finding His Place in Life

Rick said that moment in February 1970 was when he had "found my place in life." He continued to work for Tom until Tom passed away in 1981, when Rick took over Tom's Plumbing business. Rick and his dad also opened O'Neil Septic. Rick still owns Tom's Plumbing, now managed by Brandon Ward, and his son owns the septic service. Rick's brother, Steve, worked in the business for 40 years.

Family and Community Involvement

Rick married Janine in 1974 and raised a son, Ben, and two daughters, Lindsey and Heather. Rick and Janine have always been active in the community, volunteering for a variety of organizations including the Pt. Arena High School Booster Club. Rick also coached the Pt. Arena High School football team.

A Gift of Craftsmanship

One of Rick's most recent contributions to the community is a hand-turned gavel and stand made from "Pepperwood" or California Bay wood. He learned that the Gualala Community Center did not have a gavel for its Board meetings, so he created a true work of art to remedy the situation.

A Lifelong Love of Woodworking

Rick learned his craft of woodworking from his father, starting as a little boy hanging out in his father's workshop. His dad, who worked in the lumber industry, could "build anything." During winters off, he built furniture and kitchen cabinets and became skilled at wood turning, making countless gifts for family and the community. The Gualala Baptist Church still has one of his beautifully turned bowls. Rick inherited his dad's eye for unusual wood and has always gathered burls and other unique pieces for future projects.

Memories of the Original Gualala Community Center

In 1958, at six years old, Rick remembers the building of the original Gualala Community Center. "All the kids worked with their dads on the building—it was like a barn raising," he recalls. "We picked up nails and carried bricks to where the fireplace was being built. I remember Robley Duncan telling us kids that if we broke a brick, we would be in trouble." Rick says his dad built the beautiful redwood burl mantelpiece for the building and remembers the cement being mixed by hand—"two shovels of cement and ten shovels of gravel."

Still Giving Back

Today, Rick remains an active member of the GCC Rebuilding Committee, guiding plumbing projects and solving countless water and septic issues. The words "retirement" and "can't" aren't in Rick's vocabulary! He continues to graft apple trees, work with wood, and volunteer with the South Coast Fire Department as a Board member, as well as with the Gualala Community Center.

Honoring a True Community Volunteer

On behalf of the Gualala Community Center volunteers and the entire community, we honor Rick O'Neil as a good citizen and a dedicated volunteer whose contributions and spirit continue to make a difference.

Gualala Community Center Board of Directors

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