

## **Alvin Richard Burch**

Kodiak lost a pioneering fisheries icon last week with the passing of Al Burch.

Alvin Richard Burch passed on August 8, at home surrounded by family and friends. Al was born in Deer Lodge, Montana, September 25, 1936, to Alfred and Dorothy Burch, née Ranney. He grew up a country boy far from the sea, enjoying the outdoors, hunting and fishing. In high school he was involved in Future Farmers of America and raised chickens and pigs.

Al's agriculture plans ended with the death of his father in 1951. His brother Oral invited the family to join him in Seward. So Al, his brother Bill and mother packed up their belongings and drove the Alaska Highway. While he finished high school in Seward he learned to fly and began his introduction to the sea, working on Oral's barge that moved freight from ships to shore.

In 1958 he met the love of his life, Barbara. They were separated when he was drafted into the Army but on his first leave they were married. After he served and was honorably discharged he helped Oral buy a fishing boat and the union, Burch Brothers was formed. They fished a succession of boats getting involved in the fledgling shrimp fishery.

The 1964 earthquake and tsunami took their home and most of their possessions as well as the plant that was their market. Like most Alaskans they picked up the pieces of their lives and stared anew.

The new start included moving their boat to Kodiak and fishing for Bix Bonney.

Barbara and 1-year-old son Bill moved to Kodiak. Another son Keith was born after the move in 1965.

As the shrimp fishery grew, the brothers went to Mississippi to purchase a modified gulf shrimper, the Dawn. Double rigged with a stern ramp it set new standards for trawlers. The boat was very successful and led the brothers to buy another, the Dusk.

With two vessels it made sense for Al to stay on shore and deal with the paperwork and logistics. As Al settled into his office to take care of the business, he found himself a contact point for people interested in Kodiak fishing. For the media, political leaders, job seekers, and others, he was an easily reached fisherman with knowledge of the industry.

He helped found an association of shrimpers.

In the early 80's the shrimp and crab fisheries dried up and Al's attention turned to groundfish. With the establishment of the 200 mile exclusive economic zone the fishing grounds were opened to American fishermen but the markets were just beginning to show interest.

Al helped develop the groundfish industry in Alaska and helped found the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, which set up the infrastructure for pollock and other groundfish processing in the state. As the industry grew Al began to serve on many state, national and international boards and committees including a 30-year career on the Advisory Panel of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and was founder and executive director of the Alaska Dragger Association (now called Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association) for nearly 40 years.

It would be difficult to measure Al's impact on the economy of Kodiak and the state, but it is considerable. While serving on various boards and commissions, Al traveled the world to work on treaties, share knowledge, learn from others and promote Alaskan fish products. He was an excellent ambassador for the island always pleasant and positive.

Al was always a family man. He and Barbra bought property on Mission Lake where they built a home and raised the two boys. When his mother's second husband died in Anchorage, he moved her to Kodiak and set her up with a home on the property. When Oral died Al became the head of a large family of nieces and nephews. Al and Barbra's home was always open to those who need a place to stay. In 2009, Al was inducted into the United Fishermen of Alaska's Hall of Fame. In his acceptance speech he credited his wife Barbara as the best fisherman's wife.

Al was preceded in death by his mother Dorothy Swift, brothers Oral and Bill. He is survived by wife Barbra, sons Bill and Keith, and many cousins, nieces and nephews.

He leaves a large hole in the family and community. No services are planned although A Celebration of Life event will be held in Kodiak at an undetermined date in the Fall. Condolences can be sent to the family at PO Box 884, Kodiak, AK 99615.