



David Ogden

October 31, 1942 - March 3, 2018

Longtime Lincoln County resident David Ogden Stiers, a world-famous actor who used his celebrity to promote local causes, died at his home on Saturday, March 3.

According to his agent, Mitchell K. Stubbs, the cause of death was bladder cancer. Stiers was 75.

Widely known for his role as the snobbish Major Charles Winchester on the hit seventies TV show "M*A*S*H," Stiers was a towering character in the entertainment industry and a familiar figure in Newport, where he owned a home, shopped at the Farmer's Market and lent his name and talents to worthy charities and the arts.

An early supporter of the Newport Symphony Orchestra whose involvement stretched back 30 years to the struggling Yaquina Orchestra, Stiers was credited for turning the ensemble into a regional showpiece.

"All of us at Newport Symphony Orchestra are heartbroken," said Maestro Adam Flatt, music director. "Our orchestra would not be here if it weren't for his great support and inspiration over three decades."

Symphony President Joseph Swafford remarked on how Stiers, who served

as resident conductor, was an active member of the community "doing business with local merchants and sending Oregon gifts from here to his show business contacts around the country."

John Lavrakas, executive director of the symphony, commented on how Stiers - tall, balding and baritone-voiced - tried to blend in but invariably stood out.

"You had the sense he wanted to be regular folk," Lavrakas said. "You'd see him at the Farmer's Market frequently, talking to the vendors. Anyone who has a lot of celebrity gets tired of it and wants to be a person. You could sense that, but he was always David, so the conversations were quite enjoyable."

Catherine Rickbone, who manages the Newport Performing Arts Center, recalled the joy of conversing with Stiers.

"What I really liked about David was his insightful wit," she reflected. "He would like to spar intellectually and verbally, and I'd just go right along with that. He was a lot faster than I was, but sometimes I'd catch him off guard."

Rickbone paused at the recollection of Stiers's fascinating vocals, known to millions of Disney animated film fans for his roles as Cogsworth in "Beauty and the Beast" and nearly two dozen other cartoon features.

"What I also remember about David is his voice, and his love of language," she said, recalling his Christmastime readings that drew large audiences and raised thousands of dollars for the PAC. "He assumed the characters' voices as he worked his way through 'A Christmas Carol' - Tiny Tim, Scrooge, Bob Cratchit. It was storytelling at its finest, and he held the audience in the palm of his hand."

Audiences have been enthralled by David Ogden Stiers since his Broadway

debut in 1973 in a series of repertory plays with John Houseman's City Center Acting Company. He made his film debut in 1971 in Jack Nicholson's counterculture classic, "Drive, He Said." According to his filmography on Wikipedia, he has appeared in about 75 movies and nearly 60 TV shows.

In 2015, Stiers told the News-Times that one of his favorite roles was that of Mayor Nick Nicholson in the 1991 romantic comedy "Doc Hollywood" with Michael J. Fox.

"I grew up in small towns and live in one now, and I knew all the mayors," commented Stiers, who was born Oct. 31, 1942 in Peoria, Ill. "Newport's a lot like Grady, South Carolina, so I was groomed for the part."

After moving to Oregon with his family, Stiers graduated from high school in Eugene and briefly attended the University of Oregon before going to California to pursue an acting career. While he flourished in film, he was devoted to classical music.

Besides annual appearances as resident conductor of the Newport Symphony Orchestra, Stiers inspired student musicians with the "Battle of the Batons," a competition for aspiring conductors that served to raise money and new talent for the orchestra.

"He'd take these young musicians and talk about the issues they'd face, like how to stand up in a house of a hundred people and not freak out," said Lavrakas, who helped Stiers organize his Newport appearances around his busy Hollywood schedule.

Lavrakas recalled how one of Stiers's protégés, declined entrance to a college music program because it didn't allow freshmen, mentioned he had written a

play and conducted the orchestra under Stiers's tutelage.

"They said, 'Hold on a second,' and he got the spot," Lavrakas said.

Stiers will be recalled for his great roles, but it was on the smaller stage that people saw the real man: caring, benevolent and committed to protecting the environment. Chris Chandler, who works for Central Lincoln PUD, recalled how Stiers agreed to attend a conference in Yachats and speak for electric cars.

"He was the proud owner of a Tesla Roadster," she recalled. "When David arrived, he was quite impressed by a very well-behaved 8-year-old son of a BPA employee who was attending the conference. David saw the boy's look of awe when the child spotted the Roadster, chatted a bit with the boy about the car, and then very kindly offered him a ride around the parking lot.

"The boy was thrilled," Chandler remembered. "I just wish I could have seen the look on his face when he found out later his driver was the voice of the clock in 'Beauty and the Beast!'"

Former Yachats resident John Anderson was a year behind Stiers at North Eugene High School and recalled how classmates ribbed him for always lugging his drama books around.

"You could tell where he was going, even back then" said Anderson, an advertising executive at the News-Times who often found Stiers rummaging the antique shops for old albums of classical music. "The last time I saw him, he talked about the kidding. He said, 'Look at me now!'"

The Newport Symphony will have a special recognition to honor David Odgen Stiers at its upcoming concert on March 24.