

# Iron Men

Moses Lake Iron and Metal changes hands

*Holm sold company in 1979, remained manager*

BY MATTHEW WEAVER  
Herald staff writer

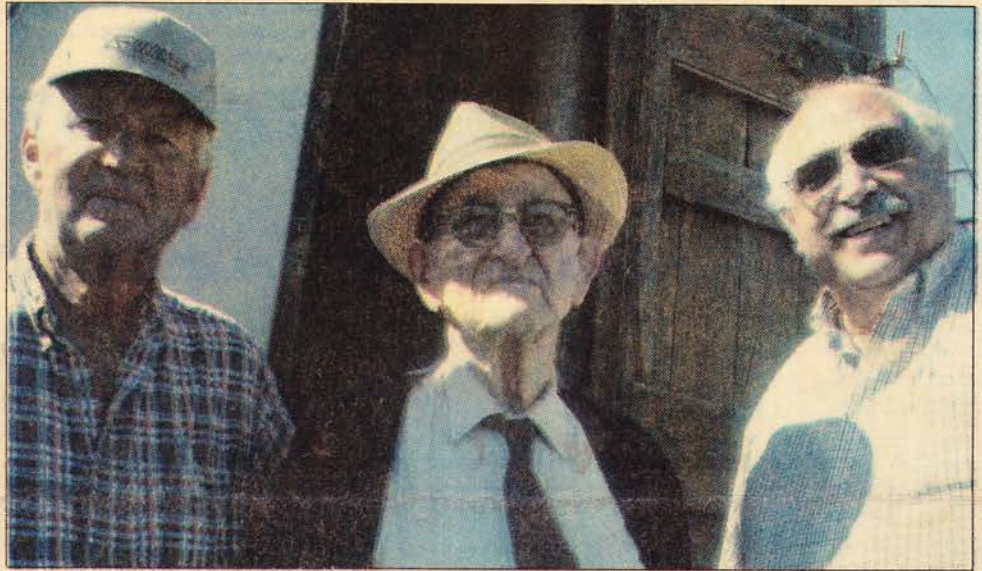
MOSES LAKE — A long-standing Moses Lake business is now under new management.

Nick Tommer, owner of Tommer Construction in Ephrata, purchased Moses Lake Iron and Metal July 1.

"I probably started frequenting Moses Lake Iron and Metal in the early 1970s, purchased items and bought scrap," Tommer recalled, explaining that that's a by-product of the construction business. Although they haven't been in the retail or marketing side of the scrap business, it's something that his family has been doing for 40 years already, he said.

Tommer said no changes are planned for Moses Lake Iron and Metal, which presently employs a range of four to eight people, although he said that some of the equipment will probably be upgraded and the company will provide a more broad service to the farming, processing and industrial fields that generate scrap. The number of employees should not change, he said.

"It's been here since 1953," Tommer said. "That's 52 years, and certainly there's a need. It's also a recycling point for aluminum cans, anything



Matthew Weaver/Columbia Basin Herald

Norman Estoos, Monte Holm and Nick Tommer stand outside Holm's favorite part of his museum yard, the old sheepwagon in which he used to live, Monday afternoon. Tommer purchased Moses Lake Iron and Metal from Estoos, who purchased it in 1979 from Holm.

that's household that's aluminum or stainless steel. People bring it in in bags, boxes and turn around and exchange it for green dollars, which ultimately might be grocery money or week-end party money."

The business recycles scrap metal that is no longer able to be used.

"It might be a wheel line that's 30 years old and becomes useless, so a farmer may bring it in here, sell it to us," Tommer explained. "We will cut it into lengths and size and then we will turn around and ship it, by either rail or truck, and it will be sent to Seattle or somewhere, to a process-

ing plant. They will melt it down and make new iron and aluminum out of the old."

Tommer said he has been pursuing the purchase of Moses Lake Iron and Metal for five years.

"It's just something that I've been inspired to want to do," he said. "It seems like something that will be fun."

Tommer said that the scrap market price is up right now.

"Everything that we as consumers purchase is up," he said, offering that cars and machinery cost more money today, a by-product of the price of steel going up. "When the steel price

goes up, then everything else goes up, and they go hand-in-hand."

Tommer's father Larry started Tommer Construction in 1959. Tommer and his wife Donna purchased it in 1987.

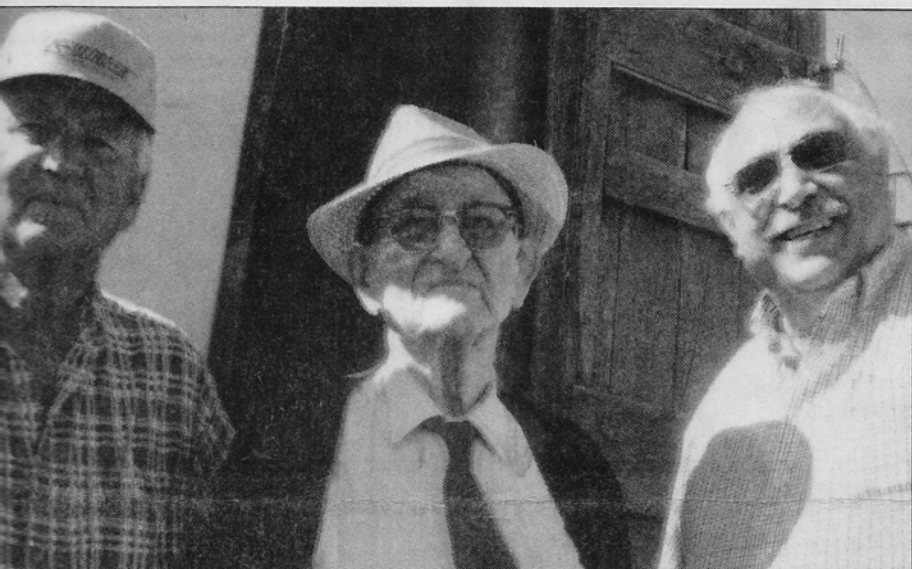
Tommer purchased Moses Lake Iron and Metal from Norman Estoos, who purchased it from founder Monte Holm in 1979. Estoos sold the company because he is looking to retire.

"I've been at this game since I was 17 years old," he said. "It's been 47 years, and that's a long time."

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## IRON:

When he was in high school, Estoos would come and visit Holm quite a bit.

"One day, he asked me if I wanted to go to work," Estoos recalled. "I said, 'Sure.' That's how it all started."

The 1979 purchase was not a widely known fact.

"We were talking one day, and we both had a foot up on the back of an old steam tractor out in the yard and we got to talking about it," Estoos recalled. "One thing led to another, and (Holm) said, 'I'm going to sell you the place,' and I said, 'Good.'"

"He had been with me for so long, and I liked him like a son, so I gave him the business, you might say," Holm said. "He actually owned it, but I run it. He's a good boy, Norman is."

The purchase was not publicized.

"Monte wanted to keep working, and so we had a good agreement," Estoos said. "We just kept going, and here we are today. I ran the yard, and he ran the office. That's how it worked. We had a good team."

Estoos said that Holm has been like a father to him. Selling the company is hard, he added.

"They're all good memories," Estoos said when asked if he had a favorite. "It's been a great 47 years. Been a big part of my life, been my life."

Estoos has known Tommer over a long period of time. Wife Sandee Estoos said that some other people were looking at Moses Lake Iron and Metal.

"Norm worked with Nick and they worked together, and I think that he feels very pleased it's Nick Tommer and his wife Donna," she said. "So we couldn't be happier. We feel like family with the Holms, Monte's been very good to us and he gave us this enormous opportunity. This doesn't happen every day to a 17-year-old boy."

Holm founded Moses Lake Iron and Metal in about 1953. During his six years as a hobo during the Depression, traveling all over the United States on trains, he walked into Everett with 10 cents — 10 cents he still has — at age 19, and got started in the junk business.

"In the early 1950s, I had a lot of lung problems because of the dampness over there, and of course I worked outdoors," Holm recalled. A doctor told him that if he wanted to live, he had to get away from the coast, which is how he came to Moses Lake. "There was no junk dealer here, and I started the yard. It's been very, very good."

Holm said that there are three elements to success: being honest, working hard and being good to people.

"Most people fall down on item three something terrible," he said. "But it's very important."

Holm said he thinks Tommer will do a good job with Moses Lake Iron and Metal.

"I think he's a good man, as far as I'm concerned," he said. "I've done business with him for a good many years, and I've



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"I think he's a good man, as far as I'm concerned," he said. "I've done business with him for a good many years, and I've never had no problems ... I wish them all the luck in the world. I could tell them that if they do the three things I tell them to, they will make a success. Of course, Nick Tommer has been a success whatever he's done. He's a fine fella."

Holm will continue to own and operate his museum, the House of Poverty. Holm's daughter and son-in-law, Karen and Wayne Rimple, remain owners of Moses Lake Steel.



## A LEGACY, A TRIBUTE AND A NEW BEGINNING

The LEGACY is that of Monte Holm. A man who's life motto has been to always be:

- 1 Honest;
- 2 Work hard; and
- 3 Treat people good.

I guess you could say his solid foundation began at the age of 6 through a little incident involving some stolen "junk," (story on page 24-25 of *Once a Hobo*), when Monte vowed to his father and to himself "to procure future junk in an honest manner..."

"*Once a Hobo*" is the Autobiography of this unique, paradoxical man and it is easy to see as you read through it, the value of life which was formed within him in his early years. There is a common thread of character throughout his whole life; beginning in the boy 6 yrs of age; the Hobo at age 13; the Sheepherder at 14; the successful owner and founder of the local junkyard, "Moses Lake Iron & Metal," husband of Ruth, proud father of daughter, Karen Holm Ripple.

The life of the man, Monte Holm, speaks a legacy of honesty, hard work and kindness toward others.

"In 1930, during the Depression, a 13-yr-old boy was forced from his home and became a hobo..." (Quote from the back of his book *Once a Hobo*) The train had become his home. Hunger then led him to become a sheepherder at the age of 14 and he arrived in Everett, WA with \$.10 in his pocket at the age of 19 to begin his career in the junk business.

Due to health issues Monte, his wife and their daughter, left the damp weather of the coast in 1953 to look for property where he could establish his business in Moses Lake, WA. Newly zoned for industrial use, the east side of Commerce Street became the new home of Moses Lake Iron & Metal.

His "life has been anything but usual" (quoted from page 224 of *Once a Hobo*), and in our current world of chaos, his foundation of business and life always being one of fairness, integrity, relationship and keeping everything SIMPLE...is to be admired, modeled and set as an example to a current generation that simplicity still works!

In 1959 a young 17 yr old, named Norman Estoos applied for a job just a couple months before his graduation from high school. Monte and he seemed to hit it off immediately...

The TRIBUTE is to Norman Estoos, who has portrayed honor and humility in business and relationship throughout his 46 yrs of employment and ownership with Moses Lake Iron & Metal. To the amazement of many, even those closest to them, including some of the employees, few have been aware of the fact that Norman and his wife Sandee, actually purchased Moses Lake Iron & Metal in 1979. Having been employed At that point for 20 yrs, it was evident Monte was not only his employer, but had become like a father. In his desire to honor Monte's ways, Norman willingly put his own dreams of change on the back burner with the hopes that the time would come one day to initiate some of those changes. However, you can't reinvent the wheel and when something works, why fix it?

Sandee and their 4 children, Shelly, Michael, Eric & Shannon honored their husband and father by humbly sitting back with him, behind the limelight and favor one might have with that of the ownership of such a successful business as he was displaying his own character traits of honesty, hard work and treating people good. His children write on behalf of their father; "Over the years our dad has exemplified to us an excellent work ethic. He has shown us how to treat others with kindness and respect. Dad has given us a heritage of strength, honor and dignity. We are all thankful for his years of service at Moses Lake Iron and Metal. He is our hero." (Shelly Estoos Wade, Michael and Eric Estoos, Shannon Estoos Herrin)

"Norman....Norman has been faithful. He really has been more like a son," says Monte. "Monte...Monte has been like a father," says Norman. "They have been a good team. That's why they've made it all these years," says those around them.

The success of Moses Lake Iron & Metal has been the combined effort and mutual commitment to serve the public faithfully by long standing employees who hold to the same qualities as Monte and Norman. Dave Fazende who has been with MLI & M since 1969 and Tom who has been with them since 1974. That, in and of itself, speaks highly for the company to have employees with the quality and longevity of dedication they have had.

The NEW BEGINNING is that of the new owner, Nick Tommer, currently of Ephrata and owner of Tommer Construction Co. The purchase of Moses Lake Iron and Metal is the "fulfillment of nearly a 30 yr. old dream," says Nick's wife, Donna. Holding himself the same qualities of importance to that of Monte and Norman; honesty, hard work and treating people good has been the foundation for the continued success of Tommer Construction Co., which Nick & Donna purchased in 1987 from his father Larry Tommer, Sr., who established the company in 1959.

Monte, Norman and now Nick; made from the same fabric. Cut from the same cloth of integrity; a heritage of simplicity. To carry on the legacy of *one old hobo* who had a dream of value from other peoples junk, men who believe that to build others up, hold's more value than building up your self. That giving really is better, than receiving.

Monte can be found at "House of Poverty" on the corner of Broadway & Commerce. He will continue giving out his candy while meeting & greeting all who stop in to say hello or to see the museum.

Norman can still be found at Moses Lake Iron & Metal, at least for a while...from one day being an employee; to another one being the owner; then another being semi-retired, consultant & friend; but ALL in a consistent manner that speaks so highly of just who Norman Estoos really is - "*you don't need a title or a famous name to tell you who you are or tell others who you are. When you are a man of integrity and honor, everyday is a new day and the joy comes in doing the best you can on any given day*"... Oh, if mankind could catch on to this simple truth, wouldn't it be a much happier place?

Nick will be found often at Moses Lake Iron & Metal. Learning, making a few changes...and more than likely, if you see him, you will not leave empty handed. Somehow, someday, you will leave with more than what you came with...he's just that kind of guy.

The Legacy of Monte Holm; the Tribute to Norman Estoos; the New Beginning for Nick Tommer; simplicity *does* work.

Written July 11, 2005