

Bass Pro Shop Catfish Pond 2005



"Dad, this is the biggest fish I've ever seen!" screamed young Diana, an eight-year old girl from Lindenhurst. "Can we catch another one? Please? Please, Dad?"

She had just battled a fat, feisty catfish of about five pounds, won, and wanted to do battle again. The body of water that she and her dad were plying? The Bass Pro Shops Catfish Pond. It was that time again for the kids' fishing pond, co-sponsored by the store and Walleyes Unlimited.

A few minutes later, Naperville's Danny Simms, 12, hauled in another big cat, using special stink bait on his hook. Although impressed with the size of his fish, he did say "I've caught bigger fish."

When your inquiring reporter asked where, Danny looked around carefully to see who was listening and responded, "In a Bolingbrook park district lake. It was over fifteen pounds!"

Okay. Sure.

Kids came from everywhere to angle for the big fish that were stocked expressly for them. Gabe Heindel, 8, came with his mom, Kelli, all the way from Appleton, Wisconsin. Gabe landed a dandy fish and told everyone how much he loves fishing. But his dad couldn't be there because he had to work. Guess what his job is? He's a muskie guide up north.

Visualize this dual image: He's up in Eagle River, flailing bucktails and jerkbaits, hoping to 'get bit' and the kid is down here in Illinois cranking in big cats. Go figure.

Elizabeth Fundora of Arlington Heights brought her daughter, Michelle, a very cute four-year old.

Although Michelle didn't catch a fish, she was overheard to say, "I like the little fishies."



J. J. Botonakas of Skokie, 8, bagged a beautiful catfish that went maybe four pounds. When asked how much he thought it weighed, he carefully reflected and then said, "I think it's about forty or fifty pounds."

J. J. must have gone to Zion's Mike Orawiec School of Fish Exaggeration.

But he wasn't the only young angler to matriculate from the esteemed institution which teaches beginners the finer points of embellishment. One kid said he caught a 30-inch crappie, another a seven pound perch, and several others, of course, had managed to bag huge whales in their short fishing careers.

Walleyes Unlimited president Mike Mulqueen helped staff the semi-annual event and remarked, "This experience means so much to many of these kids. You should see their faces light up when they get a bite and reel a fish in. The smiles say it all."

Club member John Nuebel of Libertyville, who manages this three day event twice each year for Walleyes Unlimited said that the pond is a great way to introduce kids to fishing. "Many would never get a chance to go if this pond weren't here. For some kids, they catch their first fish ever. For many others, they catch their biggest fish ever."

Nuebel's wife, Ellen, who also volunteers countless hours to make the event a success said, "We only charge a couple of dollars for this. All the proceeds go to the Walleyes Unlimited Scholarship Fund which provides college assistance to outstanding, needy students majoring in fisheries science."

Tammy, a mother who made the trip from Joliet with her two young sons said, "What a good thing this is. Young kids get to benefit now, to catch a fish, to have some fun, and then when they're in college, maybe they can earn a scholarship."
Yes, Tammy, that indeed is what it's all about.

You can write to Jim at outdoors@zegar.com and follow his trips around the country in his *MidWest Outdoors Magazine* column, "Postcards from Lake County."

