

## Bass Pro Shop Trout Pond 2006



The tempting aroma of sweet, yellow onions being fried with chopped garlic was met with that of bratwurst cooking on an open grill. A crock pot full of sauerkraut added pungency to the air, and it was all about the food. Or was it?

I gazed at the smoke wafting up from a 50 foot grill, long, curling tendrils of gray, as a hundred broiling sausages dripped delectable juices of liquid fat onto the hot coals, creating an olfactory and visual sensation second to none. A hundred feet or so to my left was a shallow pond, no more than two feet at its deepest, and it was bristling with scrappy, beautiful rainbow trout. Maybe a thousand of them.

A young man in a wheelchair was pushed past me, and I interrupted my day dreaming to look at him. It was a kid, actually, who I thought was maybe 13 or 14. I wondered how well he had done.

Where was I? The Walleyes Unlimited Kids' Fishing Pond at Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World in Gurnee. It was that time again when members of the country's greatest freshwater fishing club pool their talents for three days to help kids have fun catching trout in the

pond outside the store.

I walked over to the kid and asked him the normal question fishermen ask one another.

"Four," he said. "I caught four trout!"

"Whadyausin" for bait," I inquired.

"Berkley Powerbait. I bought it with my own money."

Josh Passfield, 13, of Wauconda was the boy in the wheel chair. "I really had a good time, sir. Tell Walleyes Unlimited that this is a cool thing."

I promised him that I would.

For three days, Friday through Sunday, club members donated over a thousand man hours to staff the trout pond and cook and sell the brats. Johnsonville Brats supplied the grill, a monstrosity that can cook 750 brats at one time. It's an enormous thing, the size of a semi-trailer tanker truck. In order to not only promote its brand name but to also assist volunteer organizations with local charities, the company donates the grill as well as a major portion of the meat and bun cost.

A little while later I walked over to the pond to watch the kids fish, to see the exited smiles on their faces and hear their squeals of cheer as they caught the scrappy trout.

A young girl, about three years old, had just caught her first fish ever, as club member Brad Miller helped her reel it in. She was adorned in pink Barbie everything and was as cute as could be. She said her name was Samantha and that she lives in Gurnee. When she exclaimed, "It's my first fishy!" you kind of got the feeling she would never forget it.

John Nuebel of Libertyville once again managed the fishing pond, and I managed the brat wagon, which included assigning members to various cooking, food preparation, and serving tasks. We cooked about 4,000 brats and at least 80 pounds of raw onions, the peeling and chopping of which was done by volunteers, including my daughter Katie, who might never want to see an onion again, or me for that matter. Personally, I think I have carpal tunnel syndrome in my left hand from opening too many jars of sauerkraut for the crock pot.

On Sunday afternoon, the heat from a radiant sun warmed an otherwise cold day, and many of us worked outside with no jacket. Music blared from the stereo system's big speakers. Kids were catching fish. People were stuffing themselves with food. It became, in fact, a party in the parking lot of Gurnee Mills. There were smiles everywhere and the only tears came from "well, you know", the onion people.

The proceeds from this event are used by Walleyes Unlimited to support its college scholarship program, fund "Take a Kid Fishing" clinics, and host "Fishing Education Day." The club also brings in top name speakers for meetings which are open to the public and offers free access to its website: [walleyesunlimitedusa.org](http://walleyesunlimitedusa.org).

I asked Nuebel if he thought all the work was worth it.



"Are you kidding?" he said. "Did you see those kids' faces?"

I did see those faces. I wish you could have, too.

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