

GANANOQUE: Fishing in Ontario's Ultimate Fishing Town

By Lorraine Payette

Whether it's the one that got away or an impressive trophy in the den, everyone has a fishing story. Possibly the most popular year round sport in our area, fishing has always been a jewel in the crown for those living in the western portion of Leeds-Grenville. Since the mid-1800s, people have been coming here in search of the giant muskie, large and small mouthed bass, and other noted fresh water game fish.



Gananoque became the star of local fishing circles when it was awarded the title of WFN's (World Fishing Network) Ultimate Fishing Town 2013 for Ontario. This is not something to be taken lightly, and a lot of work went into achieving this privileged position.

"Out of 270 plus entries in Canada that entered the WFN Ultimate Fishing Town contest, we came in second place in all of Canada," said Sandra Wright, Executive Secretarial Services & Art Supplies, member of the committee. "We had approximately

Everyone is the right age to fish in Gananoque

61,173 votes which earned us the Title of Gananoque, Ontario's Ultimate Fishing Town 2013."

The \$3,500 prize received was divided up among Muskies Canada - Gananoque & The 1,000 Islands Chapter (\$1,000) for a Radio Telemetry Research Study in the St. Lawrence River; a Guided Fishing Excursion (\$150) for four children and one adult with fishing guide, Dan Spencer; the Thousand Island Association (\$600) to purchase a shoal

marker to improve safety in the channel; the annual Gananoque Huck Finn Derby (\$300), which encourages young people throughout the area to enjoy fishing; and various items to help promote Gananoque's fishing industry.

Gananoque makes a proud claim to hosting more than 20 species of game fish along with 60 or more types of rough and bait fish. Among these are largemouth, smallmouth and rock bass; northern pikes, muskies and walleyes; perch catfish, sturgeons and bluegills. The bass fishing in the area is so good that it inspired Garry Fisher to create the annual 1000 Islands Big Bass Challenge.

"This is a tournament that welcomes all anglers regardless of size, height, age or sex," says Fisher. "Our Challenge is held on the Free Fishing Week in Ontario every year to get all anglers out to have fun..."

Started in 2012 by Fisher and his wife, the tournament keeps growing in popularity. Large cash prizes and various merchandise items are given as awards in different categories, but the biggest prize is the chance to fish for bass on the St. Lawrence River and learn what it's all about.

"We have anglers coming from Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and all places in between," says Fisher. "We even have one special boy who fishes it every year. He comes up from Mexico to see his Grandfather once a year and has asked to come in the month of July just to fish it."

The Huck Finn Fishing Derby is another special treat held every year in late June. Local children aged 12 and under get out their gear, dress up as Huck Finn and Becky Thatcher. They decorate their bikes and design floats, and with adults, parade down King Street in to the Duck Pond in Confederation Park. Once there, they have a fun filled day of fishing in the river, with each child receiving a dime for each fish he/she catches, as well as hotdogs and cake. At



Everyone is eager to get a hook in the water

At the end of the day, there are special prizes awarded for the biggest fish, enthusiasm, and best dressed bikes. Everyone goes home with something, and the competition is open to children from everywhere. The derby has been running for more than 60 years now, and parents and grandparents who fished in it are bringing their children and grandchildren out to participate.

Fishing areas are divided into zones, with Leeds-Grenville falling in zones 18 and 20. Different townships have different places to fish. These include Ashden, Simpson and Trout Lakes in Ashby; Big Ohlmann, Camp (Little Mackie), Long Schooner, Mackie, Reid and Round Schooner Lakes in Miller; Freen Lake in Lake; Little Green Lake in Clarendon; Long Mallory Lake in Abinger; Loughborough Lake in Storrington; Potspoon Lake in Bedford; Redhorse Lake in TLT; Shabomeka Lake in Barrie; Silver Lake in South Sherbrooke and Oso; Charleston Lake in Lansdowne; and the St. Lawrence River.

L: Fish are treated with respect and care during the competition; Below: A large mouthed bass makes a nice starter fish

"More people are starting to fish, and more are getting back to fishing these days," says John Sideris of Wings Bait and Tackle in Delta. "May 10th is the opening of the season for pike for Zone 18, a week earlier in Zone 20. Open season for bass is the 3rd Saturday in June."

Sideris sells a lot of minnows during the year and live bait fishing is in very high demand. He also reminds everyone that you need proper permits to fish in Ontario and that you must not catch anything out of season. Catch and release is the preferred method of fishing, unless the fish are to be consumed as food. Be sure to check Ontario regulations before going out to fish. Whether from shore or a boat, when everyone follows the rules, everyone wins. Garry Fisher agrees.

"I have had a passion for fishing for many ...," says Fisher. "Getting kids into this sport - seeing the eyes and big smile on their faces when they catch that big bass, pike or even a perch - just makes my heart melt... I will do this for many years to come." LH



For more information on fishing in Leeds-Grenville, please visit Jake's Lil Bait Shop, Lansdowne, ON; Wings Live Bait & Tackle, Lyndhurst, ON or Mud Creek Bait Shop, Gananoque, ON. They will be happy to help find any needed equipment, bait, guides, and provide information on getting the Ontario Outdoors card (fishing license).