

Outdoors

Golden Beavers are putting compassion ahead of fishing

Outdoors
Paul A. Smith
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK - WIS.

OCONOMOWOC – At dawn there was a flurry of action on northern pike. And as the sun climbed into a cobalt sky in mid-morning the largemouth bass bite picked-up.

But all of that paled in comparison to the activity at 1 p.m.

About 300 people gathered around a tent on the sparkling ice of Silver Lake in Oconomowoc.

Did someone just land a 12-pound walleye? A 2-pound yellow perch?

Actually, the hubbub wasn't about anything with fins. That's pretty much the way it goes when the Golden Beaver Ice Fishing Team holds an outing.

Although the organization has its roots in hard-water angling, it cares much less about catching than it does about giving.

The early afternoon crowd had gathered on the northeastern quadrant of Silver for the crescendo of the Beaver's 2020 event, held Feb. 22.

Michele Baumann of North Prairie served as master-of-ceremony. She grabbed a microphone and summoned 11-year-old Brody Kierzek of West Bend.

"I'll try to get through this without crying," Baumann said as she draped an arm around Kierzek. "But I think you all know why we're here, and this year it's Brody. I hope he's having a fun day. Now let's see if we can make it a little better."

Tables set on the ice in and around the tent were piled with donated prizes. Numbered buckets were filled with paper tickets.

As Baumann spoke, people continued to buy last-minute chances in dozens of raffles.

The winners were about to be determined at the eighth annual Golden Beaver Ice Fishing Team Kids Fest. But there was no scale or ruler – in fact no fish – in sight.

No, this was not your typical ice fishing event. The Golden Beavers' primary goal was to raise money for a local kid and his family as they face a health challenge.

Over the next 30 minutes, Kierzek helped draw tickets out of the buckets and Baumann read the numbers. A smile spread across Kierzek's face as cheers went up from the crowd with every announcement.

The all-volunteer Golden Beavers have a motto: "We fish for a reason."

And it's not to limit out.

The group started informally in 2008 when Andy Schultz of Oconomowoc, then a neophyte ice fisherman, was invited to join brothers Brian and Pete Baumann for a hard-water outing on School Section Lake in Dousman.

"They came out and showed me how, it was literally one of the best times of my life," said Schultz, 39. "I was like I love this, this is awesome."



Michele Baumann of North Prairie hugs Brody Kierzek, 11, of West Bend at the Golden Beaver Ice Fishing Team on Silver Lake in Oconomowoc. The event raised funds to benefit Kierzek and his family. Kierzek suffers from a chronic lung condition called bronchiectasis and has had 11 surgeries in the last three years. PAUL A. SMITH

The group adopted its name from a clip weight (commonly used by anglers to determine depth of water as they set tip-ups) they purchased that had a distinctive cast beaver head.

The Golden Beavers – which grew to include principals Norm Habersat of Dousman and Jeremy Hoadely of Oconomowoc – continued to meet for ice fishing trips on local lakes. As the years passed and the men's families grew, they began to bring their children along.

The outings began to be a "thing," so they started to call them the Golden Beavers Kids Fest. The goal at the time was to teach youth to fish and enjoy the outdoors.

Then in 2016, things changed.

The Golden Beavers learned about Steven Seraphine, a local boy who was battling leukemia. They decided in addition to teaching kids to fish they would try to raise money to donate to the Seraphine family for whatever they needed. Medical expenses, food, gas, whatever.

The Golden Beavers made up hats for sale and collected items from Lake Country businesses for raffles. They donated \$6,000 to the Seraphine family that year, Schultz said.

"What we saw on a small frozen lake was one of the most amazing things we had taken part in," the Golden Beavers state on their website. "We did not cure

anything that day, but we did make kids smile, we did make kids laugh, and we taught a few kids how to fish."

Schultz, who serves as club president, said he didn't know if the fundraising efforts would continue.

The next year, though, everyone on the club's board of directors was fully in support.

The formula was set: The organization selects a child from the area who is facing health challenges and donates all proceeds from the one-day ice fishing outing to the family.

This year Kierzek was selected. The 11-year-old from West Bend suffers from a chronic condition called bronchiectasis which causes infections and polyps in his lungs.

He's had 11 surgeries in the last 3 years to remove the polyps; his specialized treatments include frequent trips to Children's Hospital of Milwaukee and an annual visit to the National Institute of Health in Maryland.

Kierzek was accompanied to the event by his parents, Jason and Becky, his sister Faith and his grandfather Tom.

The Golden Beavers are all-volunteer; no member is compensated in any way, Schultz said. The group has applied for 501(c)(3) non-profit status and expects to receive it this year.

The events are held on Silver Lake.

The owners of Lucky Chucky's Beach Bar and Grill allow participants to park in the business's lot.

About 6 a.m. the Golden Beavers hit the ice, drill some holes and set some tip-ups with the early arriving anglers.

The crowd grows through the morning.

The main event takes place at 1 p.m. when the raffles are decided. All proceeds are immediately turned over to the beneficiary family.

The tangible portion isn't insignificant. Any family that is dealing with a serious health condition for one of its members feels an extra financial strain.

But the intangible part of the gathering could be even more important.

"It feels pretty cool to know these people support me," Brody Kierzek said.

No, the Golden Beavers Ice Fishing Team events are not typical.

They provide a lift for a kid and their family, but the local community is affected, too.

The sense of good will and compassion was palpable among the crowd on the ice of Silver Lake.

"It feels so much better to live in an area where you know people care about each other," Michele Bauman said.

If you're thinking about learning a new fishing strategy, you'd do well to emulate the Golden Beavers.

Falconers sentenced for bartering state goshawk

Paul A. Smith
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

Two falconers were sentenced March 2 for violations of the Lacey Act and other offenses for their roles in the illegal barter of a wild northern goshawk taken from a nest in Wisconsin.

James Kitzman, 69, of Oak Creek, who took the young bird from the nest on state land in Vilas County, was fined \$15,000 and ordered not to engage in falconry for three years.

Edward Taylor of Fruitport, Michigan, who accepted the goshawk from Kitzman and later lied about it to authorities, received a fine of \$10,000 and was ordered to forfeit the bird.

The sentences were handed down in federal district court in Madison. They resulted from a 2017 investigation between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Law Enforcement, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Office of Law Enforcement.

The Lacey Act is a federal law enforced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-

CALENDAR

April 11-12

Youth turkey hunt.

April 15-21

First period of spring turkey hunt.

May 2

General inland fishing opens.

vice that makes it illegal to knowingly transport or sell wildlife taken in violation of state, federal, tribal and foreign laws or regulations.

When the Lacey Act was passed in 1900, it became the first federal law to protect wildlife. It enforces civil and criminal penalties for the illegal trade of animals and plants.

Licensed falconers can take birds from the wild and keep them for hunting.

But they can't sell or barter the birds. Northern goshawks, like hundreds of species, are also protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

As in so many outdoor pursuits, a code of ethics plays a large role in abid-

ing by laws and protecting the resource.

Case documents show on May 26, 2017, Kitzman took from the wild a young female northern goshawk from a nest located on state land in Vilas County.

Kitzman then gave the bird to Taylor across state lines. The illegal act was an effort to repay Taylor for earlier providing Kitzman with a captive-bred Finnish goshawk.

Both Taylor and Kitzman filled out false reports with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in an attempt to cover up their actions.

Kitzman told his associates to "keep it hush-hush and not tell anybody" that he was giving the female northern goshawk to Taylor, according to information released by investigators. Kitzman also told Taylor to use a false cover story if ever asked by authorities about how the northern goshawk was taken and transferred.

Kitzman paid the \$15,000 fine at the March 2 sentencing; the money will be donated to the Lacey Act Reward Fund.

Taylor was ordered to transfer the illegally taken northern goshawk to

USFWS officials so it could be placed with a wildlife rehabilitator for its eventual release back into the wild.

Waterfowl hearings

The DNR will hold public hearings this week to collect input on regulations, season dates and bag limits for ducks, Canada geese and other migratory game birds for the 2020 hunting seasons.

The hearings begin at 7 p.m. and will be held:

Monday at the DNR Service Center, 3550 Mormon Coulee Road, La Crosse.

Tuesday at AmeriVU Inn and Suites, 1710 South Main Street, Rice Lake.

Wednesday at Fox Valley Technical College, D.J. Bordini Center, 5 N. Systems Drive, Appleton.

Thursday at Wildwood Lodge, N14 W24121 Tower Place, Pewaukee.

Alternatively, the public can provide input by sending comments to Taylor Finger, DNR migratory bird ecologist, by email to taylor.finger@wisconsin.gov, by phone at (608) 266-8841 or by mail to Taylor Finger, Wisconsin DNR, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707.