

## A Special but Sad Moose Lake News by Jim Onarheim

Last weekend Joel Miller and I went to the Madison Fishing Expo in Madison WI. The event was held at the Alliant Energy Center. The event had 251 vendors for all parts of the country including Canada. Pete Mania Musky expert from Round Lake was one of the featured speakers. He gave several good seminars during Friday and Saturday.

Tom Leahy who is a guide from Hayward and Alexa were promoting the Chippewa Flowage. The Hayward area was represented by both the Chippewa Flowage Resort Association and the Hayward Lakes Visitor and Convention Bureau. We were both trying to bring visitors to Hayward for this summer. The show was very well attended by thousands of people. Joel and I are all talked out for at least a couple of weeks. Our next show is in Eau Claire March 20-22 and then we go to Minneapolis the last week of the month.

I spoke with Charlie Oldenburg from Charlie's Fine Foods. Charlie told me that the restaurant is temporarily closed but is up for sale. He told me that if it is not sold by May 1<sup>st</sup> they will open for the fishing opener for meals and bar service. I will have more on this as information becomes available.

The youth Musky Hunt has been a part of Moose Lake for the past 9 years. Because of its popularity and growth I'm sorry to report that this past fall was the last year that the event will be held on Moose Lake. The event will now be moving to Round Lake because of a new path that the Youth Conservation will be taking. Kevin Bushnick Founder of the YCA (Youth Conservation Alliance) of Hayward & organizer for the Youth Musky Hunt, sent me this e-mail.

First, I want to thank you all for helping and serving the kids & their families with me throughout this endeavor of the Youth Musky Hunt on Moose Lake. Each business whether a resort, a restaurant, or a fishing guide has been utterly fantastic. You have all been easy to work with, very flexible. I appreciate you dealing with me on the price of everything over the past 9 years. The food in particular was excellent & more like a feast each time.

The guides did a tremendous job and gave away a lot of secrets, and not to brag or anything, but we caught over 500 Muskies for the kids and their families. I have zero complaints and the best thing, all fish were released..

A very special thanks to all MOOSE LAKERS & Jim Onarheim (my Champion) and the Mystic Moose Resort; later Joel & Sara Miller, and of course Jack & Pam at Louie's Landing, Chuck & Julie Oldenburg at Charlies Fine Foods. Faye Winters at Louies Landing Resort; later Brian & Alison Spindler who nonw own the cabins there. Also, thanks to Denise Picchietti at Northern Exposure and Mike Williams. Lodging at times was a challenge so we piled kids, parents and boats in everywhere we could.

From the beginning, there was Larry Ramsell, our very first guide-Master, than John Myhre and Daryl Neibauer followed in subsequent years. Thanks to the Reinemann family and the Hexum family. We started with 8 kids (2 of them were mine!) at our first event in 2010. We cranked this thing up to nearly 100 kids as the years clicked by. Yes it got a little crazy at times with all the people but fortunately, Chris & Tammy opened up the Virgin Timber Lodge on Moose Lake so we could feed everyone at breakfast & lunch while under a solid roof-At no charge I might add! And how cool was it to have Tom and Chris

Mahoney from Robin's Nest come on-site to cook breakfast! And then Ray Lopez from Ray Jay's Smokehouse serving up his special recipe's on-site at lunch. We were filmed by ABC, NBC, Northland Outdoors, the Travel Channel and featured annually by the Sawyer County Record News. Our list of individuals who donated and business sponsors was extensive and we enjoyed some great speakers at our awards ceremonies like Pete Maina, Mic Isham and Famous Dave (The BBQ King).

Beyond thanks... I simply could not have pulled these events off without the many people who would drive up from Illinois 800 miles round-trip to take someone else's child fishing. This was at their own expense and time off work; that would be, the wonderful men and women of Fox River Valley Muskies. This included Bill & Diana Nuyttens. Bill worked at NBC in Chicago as their go-to field camera-man for nearly 40 years. "Billy", brought all his filming expertise (4 Emmy's to his credit) to document the Youth Muskie Hunt every year. A "thank you" is not enough for this bunch who volunteered their time to guide and film for me, and more importantly for the kids. Not only are they Muskie fishing experts, but they are truly good-hearted people who are trustworthy around children. I had 100% confidence in them, and they delivered every time.

One thing is for sure, together, we've changed many lives at these events. We've accomplished a lot and we have much to be proud of. I'm also thankful that with all these kids, their families, boats all over the place, and some ridiculous & wild weather, nobody ever got hurt. We made it a safe program for all and I truly feel God was watching over us.

Kevin said as I get older, I realize most everything in life has its "life-cycle." We've enjoyed a tremendous run with our Moose Lake program, but I feel in my heart, it's time to do something different, and this September, we won't be back to Moose Lake. I feel bad about it, but at the same time I feel it's the right thing to do for the YCA. It was a difficult decision for me personally, and for everyone on the Board of Directors within the YCA.

This year, will be the YCA's 10th birthday. There are a few reasons for a change here, but most importantly, we simply need to make the YCA more about environmental education and less about a specific fish. My hope is, you'll all understand the direction we're heading in. We can still hunt for Muskie's, but they just won't be at the forefront of our mission.

One education example over the past 12 months, included an aquatic vegetation study with some very intelligent biologists on Round Lake where we did in-depth research on over 30 species of aquatic plants. This is particularly important because of the invasive species we are finding in our lakes like Eurasian Milfoil. It also ties directly into Water Quality, one of the most critical things on the planet to all of us. This specific type of research has also brought us to a place where we can have the kids study the effects of micro-plastics now being found in our most pristine lakes; including Lake Tahoe. Plastics are awful for our entire food chain and the overall environment.

Another high-profile opportunity that came up recently, is to work with NASA studying how fish eggs will develop in space in zero gravity. Our plan is to go to Cape Canaveral with a group of kid's mid-year with fertilized eggs and send the eggs (not the kids) up into space. The objective is to see how the eggs develop and grow from an egg in a test tube all the way to the dinner plate for astronauts living on the Space Station. I never thought while doing our research over the years with kids at fish hatcheries would ever launch the YCA into working directly with NASA. It's humbling actually; and validates the research we're doing is valuable.

For our 10th anniversary, we will celebrate it on Round Lake over Fathers-Day weekend June 20-23 and will include many Hayward kids. It will be a multi-species fishing event and we will be utilizing pontoon boat stations at various locations around the lake so kids can snorkel and/or view all fish with our underwater camera's. We will have these stations set up over some of the way-cool fish cribs and vegetation areas we have now located.

There is so many things I think the kids will be interested in above and beyond just fishing. These types of activities tie directly into environmental sciences and hopefully, we will put a spark in these area kids to become the next generation of biologists and scientists. Our public schools are teaching these things less and less as time goes on. It's called science and environmental stewardship. We do need more of it, In our life, not less.

With my sincerest thanks, Kevin Bushnick - Kids Fishing Advocate. [www.theyca.org](http://www.theyca.org) The YCA is a 100% non-profit organization. To donate <https://theyca.org/donations/>

That is all the news from Moose Lake this week. Happy Birthday and Anniversary to those who will be celebrating. Because of space I will list your names next week. Jim Onarheim Community Columnist for the Sawyer County Record.