

ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT

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Well, it's been a quiet and productive year at Indian Lake.

Russell's Point and Lakeview are finally completing their respective recovery from the tornadoes that tore through the area two years ago. In fact, several new businesses have cropped up in the spaces left by the storms.

Dollar General has opened what they call a "DG Market," a small grocery store just outside Russell's Point where Tinsley's IGA used to be, and most folks consider it an improvement. Where else can you buy a homemade Moon Pie that's eight inches in diameter?

A group of local businesspeople purchased the Comfort Inn and changed it into the Cobblestone Inn Hotel and Suites. They put a state-of-the-art fish-cleaning station in the back-parking lot and have been doing great business all summer.

The old Donut Shop is doing so well that – well, let a brief story demonstrate just how well they are doing:

Everyone knows that the best donuts they sell at the Donut Shop are their apple fritters. Certainly, they are the favorites of the Feldmeyer family. So, my niece Alyssa—Ben's daughter—and her family are up there at the lake over the long July 4 weekend, and on Friday, her husband, Derrick, hops in the ski boat and shoots across the lake, docks across the road from the Donut Shop, goes up to the window, stands in line and, when he finally gets to the window at about 10:30 AM, asks for half a dozen apple fritters.

Sorry, the tattooed, multi-pierced, purple-haired daughter of the owner says, we're out of apple fritters. Chagrined but not defeated, Derrick buys a dozen other donuts and heads back to the house.

Saturday morning, same thing. Ski boat, dock across the road, stands in line. Arrives at the window at about 10:30. Same girl. Sorry, we're out of fritters.

Sunday morning, same thing, again. Sorry, we're out of fritters.

Now Derrick is just a little miffed and vexed over the fritter situation, so he says to the girl, "You know, I'm a certified financial planner, and I help people make money from investments. Can I offer you a little business advice?" The bored girl almost yawns, almost rolls her eyes, but nods instead. Derrick continues: "If you run out of fritters every day and people still want to buy them, maybe you should make more fritters."

She turns full on to him, and says, "Can I offer you some advice?" But she doesn't wait for an answer, she just charges ahead: "If you want fritters so bad, try getting here before 10:30."

So, yeah. The Donut Shop is doing very well.

NOODLING AND MAGNET FISHING

Early in the spring, Dave Jacobson, owner of Dave's Fine Foods and True Value Hardware, began selling life-sized plastic swans, coyotes, and owls which, he read on the internet, would scare off the Canada geese swarming and befouling the areas around the lake. Those artificial critters sold like hotcakes and could be seen in yards and campsites all around the lake. Of course, it took the geese only about a week to realize the coyotes, swans, and owls were fakes, so they didn't really work after that. The geese just moved in and around them.

Magnet fishing hit a surge of popularity for a while in late June and most of July. Magnet fishing is when you tie a strong magnet to a rope or cord and throw it off a bridge or the back of a boat and drag it along the bottom of the lake and then pull it up and see what you got. There's a whole series dedicated to it on the Discovery Channel.

Dave's Fine Foods and True Value Hardware sponsored a magnet-fishing tournament with a \$50 prize for the best haul. It kinda went bust, though, when folks realized that what they were fishing out of the lake mostly amounted to fishhooks, boat propellers, and one Civil War-era bayonet.

The bayonet, it turned out, belonged to Corporal Oliver Briggs of the Sons of the Great Conflict Civil War reenactors club, who lost it while he was ice fishing in uniform two years ago. No one asked him why he was ice fishing in the uniform of the 24th Tennessee Sharpshooter Battalion. It's just not the kind of thing you ask a dedicated reenactor.

The entire Daydo family, all 14 of them, were arrested and fined by the rangers for noodling catfish over in Turkeyfoot. That's where you get in the water and walk along the rocky shore and stick your hand between the rocks trying to find a big catfish nesting to lay her eggs. When you find one you stick your hand in her mouth halfway up to your elbow and grab the gills from the inside and pull her out of her nest.

Noodling is illegal in Ohio, but the Daydos are originally from Kentucky, where it's legal, and they didn't know it was illegal in Ohio. Only they would have known that if they had applied for a fishing license, which is required for noodling in Kentucky, so some think their story is a little "fishy." But the rangers accepted their excuse and just fined them for fishing without a license and told them not to do it again. They agreed that they were done with noodling, and not one soul in Logan County who has had anything to do with the Daydos believes that's true.

The Feldmeyers customarily hold their family reunion at the lake over the 4th of July weekend, but they decided that there were too many conflicts on that holiday, what with the grandkids marching in parades and the like. Also, Ben says there are too many boats being driven by too many drunks on the lake on holidays, so it's best to stay on dry land. So, this year we moved the reunion, popularly known as Feldy-palooza, to mid-July.

We had a smaller group than usual. Only about 35 or so. Older grandkids have jobs or are getting ready to head off to college. Also, truth be told, I think they find the reunion somewhat boring. We grandparents love sitting around in the shade telling the same stories over and over, taking boat rides, bobber fishing for bluegills and catfish, and eating huge meals.

And, if you got restless there was the Antique Car, Boat, and Gun Show in Huntsville and the Farmer's Market and Craft Fair in Lakeview. Still, the young adults in the family do not, for some reason, find these opportunities compelling.

What they might have found interesting, had they been there, however, was the 61st Annual Indian Lake Rowboat Regatta. Often a nice, family friendly event, this year it was a battle of epic proportions.

THE 61st ANNUAL INDIAN LAKE ROWBOAT REGATTA

It all started back in 1962 when Hank Berseford and Jerry Miles, brothers-in-law, married to twin sisters Marietta and Maryanne Wickham, were fishing together, each in his little six-foot fishing skiff, late on a warm, sunny Saturday afternoon, and they ran out of beer.

Since they were splitting the cost of the beverage, they had to go together to buy it, which meant stowing their fishing gear and rowing around Shawnee Island and over to Jack's Landing on Tecumseh Island. It was all going smoothly until Hank said, matter-of-factly, "Last one there buys." And it was on.

Exactly who won and who paid for the beer that day is a detail that has been lost in the annals of history, but it is roundly accepted that this little competition, which continued the next year, was the seed that, two years later, in 1965, was named the Indian Lake Rowboat Regatta. An official course was set that started at the marina, looped out and around the islands, and ended at the boat ramp in the State Park, a total of about three miles. Also, a whole bunch of other people had decided to join in the fun, with businesses, clubs, churches, and neighborhoods sponsoring entries of their own. This year the winner would receive a large, some-said gaudy trophy with a sailboat on the top because Trophy World in Bellefontaine doesn't make trophies with rowboats, and a \$100 gift certificate to Dave's Fine Foods and True Value Hardware.

The regatta has only one rule. Your boat must be a rowboat with no more than two oars, only one rower or oarsman to a boat. Others can ride along if they want but only one can row at a time. That's pretty much it. So, as you might imagine, the regatta has become a pretty rowdy affair, and it is not uncommon for the call of "ramming speed" to be heard floating over the lake.

It is a given that the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and the youth groups from the Methodist and Lutheran churches will spend more time trying to turn over each other's boats than rowing. The Lakeview Senior Citizens Center usually sponsors a couple of boats whose oarsmen expend a great deal of energy splashing each other and laughing. The volunteer fire department and the Russell's Point police department each have a boat entered in the race. There's usually a Confederate boat and a Union boat, each sponsored by the Sons of the Great Conflict Civil War reenactors club, who are more interested in firing off blank rounds at each other from their muskets than actually rowing.

The real story, however, was about the serious racers who had entered the contest this year.

Those serious racers were as follows:

Francis “Frank” Lehman III, is the 29-year-old son of Francis Lehman Jr., the owner of the biggest farm in four counties. Frank 3, as he is called, was representing the community of Roundhead, and his ten consecutive wins had tied the old record set by Daniel “Big Dan” Becker in 1981. If Frank 3 won this year, he’d break the record and set a new record no one expected ever to be beaten. Frank was racing in the same custom-built racing skiff he used in the other ten races, called Wildfire 3.

Bruce Campbell, 24, of the Island Campbells of Perry County, who are widely considered to be the richest family on the lake, had finished second for the last five years and was fanatically passionate about winning this year, so much so that he was rowing a professional racing skiff built by the Empacher company, which makes the racing shells used by the world-famous Harvard rowing team. Empacher doesn’t usually make racing skiffs, but they took on this challenge as a favor to a loyal Harvard alum and generous contributor, Mr. AJ Campbell. The nine-foot Campbell family racing skiff, which drew much attention from the crowd around the starting line, was rumored to cost in excess of \$10,000. It was blue and white and was named The Blue Marlin.

Brad Limely, the 17-year-old son of Leon, was allowed into the regatta on a technicality. Seems that even though the Limely family lived in Dayton and not on the lake, they have two residences there, one on either side of the water, making them, technically, residents of the lake region. These are the Limelies who, you may remember, rammed their speedboat into a big patch of lake moss a year ago last Memorial Day and had to leave the boat sitting there for four days until the rangers, who were in no hurry, could cut it free. Brad was rowing Die Bokkenrijder (The Black Rider), an eight-foot-long Roeiwerf racing skiff imported for this race from the Netherlands at a total price of \$16,000, or so the gossip went.

The sentimental favorite was 66-year-old Willis Marrs, representing the village of Bell Center. Willis was rowing a seven-foot-long wooden skiff that was built by his father, Dalton, and in which Dalton won the very first Rowboat Regatta in 1965. Willis had spent the past year fixing, repairing, sanding, sealing, and rebuilding his father’s winning boat so he could row it in the race, not expecting to win but just to honor his father’s achievement.

Willis’s little skiff was called the Marjorie after his mother and it had upon it no electronic devices – no stroke counter, no GPS speedometer, no Garmin speed and cadence sensor. It had 2 oars, also made by Willis, and its oarsman (Willis) who had spent a year getting himself and his boat in shape and ready for this race. It was said by those who knew him that what he lacked in technology and ship craft, he made up for in heart.

The race began exactly at 12:00 noon. The Sons of the Great Conflict civil war reenactors fired their cannon, and the oarsmen made their first stroke. The race was on:

Well, it was supposed to be on, but when the cannon sounded the youth entries attacked each other as they always do, in a hilarious parody of the Battle of Lake Erie, complete with

someone shouting, "We have met the enemy and they are ours." But there was something different about the battle this year, as if it was being done carefully and in slow motion.

The Senior Citizens, who usually just splashed each other with paper cups full of water were, this year, armed with those pump water bazookas that shot out great streams of water not unlike those of a fire hose. And so great were those streams that they managed to drench nearly every other boat in the race.

The Union and Confederate Navies came together at the starting line in an explosion of musket fire so loud that it nearly deafened the senior citizens and created a cloud of smoke that hung over the water so thick that everyone momentarily lost their bearings and started out by rowing in the wrong direction.

Everything went silent for about 30 long seconds while people tried to peer into the gray cloud of musket smoke and see what was going on. Then, suddenly, a great roar went up as the Marjorie, piloted by Willis Marrs shot out of the smoke and began making its way toward the islands.

A few seconds behind him came the Police and Fire boats each containing four people with one rowing. They were shouting good natured insults at each other and having a grand time, both groups surprised that they were in the front half of the pack.

Ten yards back came 17-year-old Brad Limely, rowing his father's \$16,000 Black Rider with a rowing form that was so ungainly that people might have laughed had he not been making such good time. To his right was Frank the Third in the Wildfire 3, seeming to row with no effort, not breaking a sweat, at a pace that if he kept at it would easily take him to his 11th and record-setting win.

Bruce Campbell, however, was determined to spoil Frank's plan. He was about 20 yards behind Frank, rowing the custom-made Blue Marlin for all he was worth, biceps bulging, sweat streaming down his face and soaking his T-shirt that was already wet thanks to the senior citizens, his face set in a scowl of grim determination.

They rounded the Shawnee Island chain and passed the one-mile buoy in that order—Willis in the Marjorie, Police Department, Volunteer Fire Department, Brad Limely in the Black Rider, Frank the Third in the Wildfire 3, and Bruce Campbell in the Blue Marlin.

On the other side of the islands there was no wind and the lake was smooth as glass, a great opportunity to make up any lost time, except the Percy Marlborough Bridge was on that side of the four-island chain. The bridge stood on two piers, and boats were prohibited from passing under it on the ends. All of the boats had to go between the piers, which meant they had to go through one at a time. Which meant someone was going to have to yield while they were all going at top rowing speed and let someone else into the line.

Willis, in the lead, shot through without a problem. It was clear to the people standing on the bridge and watching that either the fire fighters or the police were going to have to yield to the other team, allowing them to go first but yielding was not written into this race.

Both boats hit the gap between the piers at the same time and there was a great sound of cracking and splintering, yelling and cursing, and some big splashes as both boats came apart in the crash. Willis slowed and turned around to see if anyone was hurt and was greeted with the sight of Bruce Campbell in the Blue Marlin blasting through the wreckage, followed by Frank the Third who had slowed the Wildfire 3 considerably to make sure everyone was unhurt, himself followed by Brad Limely in his father's \$16,000, Black Rider.

They rounded the two-mile buoy—Willis Marrs in the Marjorie, with Bruce Campbell's Blue Marlin in second. Third place was Frank the Third in Wildfire 3, and Brad Limely in the Black Rider running in fourth place.

One mile to go.

About a quarter mile past the Percy Marlborough Bridge is the Cranberry Channel, a narrow passage about 75 yards long, 15 yards wide, 10 feet deep, with shallows only about two feet deep on either side. This channel is a no-wake zone, with buoys on either side marking it so boaters can use it and avoid getting stuck in the shallows. The no-wake law is lifted for the race, but even rowboats have to be careful not to venture outside of the buoys and get hung up.

Willis Marrs hit the channel but, out of habit, he slowed down to obey the no-wake law. Bruce Campbell, seeing a chance for his first win, slammed into Willis, knocking him into the shallows and took the lead a muddy cloud in his wake.

Frank the Third saw it happen and slowed as he approached the Marjorie, stuck in the mud where he would sit for at least two hours before the rangers came to tow him out. He would later say that at that moment it occurred to him that this whole thing that started with a beer run sixty years ago was getting a little too serious, and maybe ten wins was enough, so he stopped. He untied the rope from his anchor and tossed one end to Willis as he tied his end to the cleat at the stern of his boat. He pulled up close and Willis stepped carefully into the Wildfire 3, allowing the Marjorie to rise in the water, and just as Brad Limely shot past them in the Black Rider, Frank pulled on his oars. The Marjorie popped out of the mud, and Willis stepped back into her, thanked Frank, and started rowing like a champion, chasing Brad Limely in the Black Rider and Bruce Campbell in the Blue Marlin, now some 40 yards away.

Frank laid onto his oars and followed Willis Marrs, quickly passing 17-year-old Brad Limely who was getting winded and slowing down. Apparently, his ungainly rowing technique was not serving him well, physically, and he was beginning to think that some of that \$16,000 might have been more wisely spent on rowing lessons or time in the gym.

Willis Marrs had, in fact, spent copious time in the gym in preparation for this day, but at 66 his age was working against him. He was, he began to realize, no match for these young guys with their store-bought, fiberglass, epoxied painted racing skiffs. Try as he might, he just couldn't go any faster. No great loss, though. He was never in it to win, really, just to make a good showing and honor his dad. So, he wasn't surprised when 29-year-old Frank Lehman III

passed him in the Wildfire 3. Even Frank, he realized, was beginning to sweat and show the strain. Willis rested a five-count and resumed rowing.

Frank was only about 30 feet behind Bruce Campbell in the Blue Marlin when they rounded Apple Island and came in sight of the finish line at the State Park boat ramp. A crowd had gathered there to see what they figured would be a dramatic finish and a roar went up as soon as the two boats came into sight.

When the crowd cheered, Bruce Campbell turned, looked over his shoulder, saw Frank coming on with that steady easy rowing technique of his and realized that the 10-year champion was not going to catch him. The race was his. No more second place. No more listening to his father tell him that second place is just another name for first loser. He looked back at Frank and thought of all that and he grinned a big, toothy grin.

Something in that grin lit a fuse in Frank Lehman. He didn't know if he had enough distance left to pass Campbell, but there was one thing he could do that would change the face of this whole race for years to come. He laid on his oars and rowed for all he was worth, closing the gap between the two boats. Campbell's championship racer was the better boat, but Frank was the better oarsman, and it showed as he began to close the gap between them.

Thirty feet. Twenty-five feet. The finish line was coming up fast, now only 30 yards away. Twenty feet separating the boats. Campbell turned to look again but didn't grin this time. He found a few ounces of energy and rowed harder. Finish line in 20 yards. Fifteen.

And right there, fifteen yards from the finish was where Frank Lehman gave a mighty heave on his oars and, instead of passing Bruce, he rammed his Wildfire 3 into the stern of Bruce Campbell's custom made \$10,000 racing skiff. Bruce had paid extra to reinforce the bow, but he had neglected to reinforce the stern so the fiberglass in the rear of the boat simply crumbled like balsa wood.

At first, Frank thought he'd miscalculated as he saw the Blue Marlin shoot ahead after he hit her but then, 20 feet from the finish line, she stopped as water began to fill the boat. And Frank's boat as well. No danger, though as the water near the boat ramp was only a few feet deep.

Bruce Campbell stood in the Blue Marlin, as it sank, cursing and threatening Frank. Frank remained seated and grinned back at Bruce and waved a friendly wave to Willis Marrs as the old man rowed past the two of them and across the finish line, the winner of the 61st Annual Indian Lake Rowboat Regatta.

That night at the Lighthouse Inn there was much back slapping and congratulations offered over icy cold beverages. As those gathered there recounted what they had seen that day Frank Lehman offered only that of all the races he had run in the regatta, this one was his favorite.

Frank had won the race by losing it.

Jesus said that if we want to save our lives we must first lose them, give them up to our brothers and sisters. And apparently, that applies to boat races as well.

AMEN