

A perfect weekend for perfect fishing

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By Jason Isaac
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The 11th Annual Poutmasters Fishing Derby drew a large crowd of avid anglers and first time fishers to the banks of the Castor River from Russell to Casselman and event organizer, Mike Leman was happier than a fish in water at its success. This was a big turn around from the sad news that the derby had been cancelled this season only a mere five weeks ago.

"I had been involved in the tournament from 2004-2007," said Leman. "It is a good event for a good cause and when I saw plans to cancel this year's edition, I jumped back in" and got it back on track." He added, "I knew a lot of people that would come out and assist and we would be able to pull this event off in this short period of time."

The centrepiece of the event was at the Russell Dam where fishers of all ages cast their rods hoping to catch the biggest catfish of the tournament. On site, was a charity fishing pond run by Leman's daughter Vanessa, who by 3:00 p.m. on Saturday had already raised \$70. The SNC had an educational display that included a live turtle, a BBQ for the famished, and a huge army tent to house the over 280 prizes that were waiting to be won at the end of the tournament.

"The South Nation Conservation Authority have been phenomenal, lending free rods to those without one who just wanted to be part of the action," said Leman. "The Ministry of Natural Resources were also on site as well answering questions about fishing and regulations concerning watershed conservation."

The purpose of the Poutmasters Derby was two-fold: learn and love fishing and appreciate the environment. We encouraged all participants to leave the environment along the river the way they found it," said Leman. "That means picking up all the garbage."

Leman's team had help from 18 area high school students who volunteered their time as part of their graduation credits. They ran the registration booth, the weigh-in area, collected garbage, assisted with the BBQ and helped out any

fisher who had a question or needed assistance at the derby.

"This year the awarding of the grand prize was done a little differently," said Leman, who noted that anyone catching a catfish over the weekend would receive a ballot to win either a canoe or a kayak. Size and weight measurements did however play a factor in the awarding of the remaining prizes with



Pictures: Saturday highlights of the 11th Annual Poutmasters Fishing Tournament at the Russell Dam. It was a fish frenzy all weekend long.

Photos By Jason Isaac

the biggest catch winning first pick and then the second biggest, and so on.

The grand prizewinner of the canoe was wide-eyed five-year old, Owyn Gauthier from Russell. According to Leman, "Owyn's fish, which was 450 grams was not the largest, a five-year old winning the grand prize was the highlight of the weekend in my opinion since this is the essence of why I stepped forward and took over this community event."

Marc Bourque's ballot was pulled for the

kayak.

The funds from the tournament cover operating expenses with the remainder being donated to the Canadian Cancer Foundation. Over \$35,000 has been donated to the cause in the decade that the derby has been afloat. The final tally for this year had not been calculated by press time but organizers are confident that the amount will be substantial considering the almost 400 participants, donations from corporate sponsors as well as individual donations. "I won't name

names, but we had a guy stop by the tent today and give us a personal cheque for \$250," said Leman. "He said that his son had grown up coming to the Poutmasters tournaments and the derby had provided a lot of motivation and character building to his son. The money was his way of saying, 'thanks.'"

It is that kind of community spirit that spurred on Mike Leman to save the Poutmasters Fishing Tournament and take the helm for years to come. Congratulations to all involved - and good fishing!



Go Fish!

Ten year old Brendan Marchessault waits in eager anticipation for a nibble on his line during the 11th Annual Poutmaster- Fishing Tournament this past Saturday. For more on the event turn to page 7.

Photo By Jason Isaac