

Musky Moon event held at Camp American Legion

Organizers look to hold more events to benefit veterans in the future

BECKIE GASKILL/LAKELAND TIMES PHOTOGRAPHS

By Beckie Gaskill
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

For the eleventh year, guides offered up their services to take veterans out for a weekend on the water in search of the fish of 10,000 casts. Two years ago, Jeff Stoleson, a veteran himself, took over the event from Todd Schultz, who started the event over a decade ago as a way to give back to veterans.

Schultz said he and his son were watching a hunting program on television with the Wounded Warrior Project and came up with the idea to give back. He had been into musky fishing for many years, and he wanted to share his passion for it while giving back to veterans at the same time. Schultz contacted the Wounded Warrior Project around Christmas time of that year, and the event started the next year, with two veterans. It has grown consistently from there.

"I handed it off to Big Jeff in 2020," Schultz said. "And he has blossomed this into something bigger than I anticipated and more than what I even thought even I could do. It's a great event to get our veterans outdoors and enjoying the water, fish or no fish."

Musky fishing, he said, teaches a lot about life. It teaches that, if a person works hard, the reward at the end is going to be big. Seeing the veterans just relax for the weekend, he said, was bigger than seeing them catch a 50-inch fish.

This year's event was held out of the Camp American Legion in Lake Tomahawk. The event part of Take Em Outdoors, a non-profit organization dedicated to severely ill or terminally ill children and combat-wounded veterans. The mission of the organization is to get those people outdoors into the woods or on the water to enjoy fishing and hunting. Stoleson, who is the veteran's representative for Take Em Outdoors, said the group also had a hunt going on in Wyoming on the same weekend, with terminally ill children from several states taking part in an antelope hunt of a lifetime.

In all, there were 11 veterans and eight guides who took to the lakes of the Northwoods for two days of fishing for the elusive esox. While the muskies were less than cooperative over the weekend, Stoleson said they were able to raise a few and several good-sized northern pike were caught.

Events such as this one, however, are much less about the catching than they are about spending time on the water, and at the camp. The camaraderie between veterans and between veterans and guides is the biggest

part of the event.

"It's the smiles on the vets' faces," Stoleson said. Guides

"It's the smiles on the vets' faces,"

Jess Stoleson
Take Em Outdoors

came from across the state from clubs such as Bill's Musky Club in Wausau, God's County Musky Club and the Musky Shop in Minocqua. Veterans each received a rod from Bear Rods, as well as gear from a variety of manufacturers such as Musky Mayhem, who has been involved for 10 years, Musky Innovations, Suick, Llundgren Lures, Indian

Creek Bucktails, Sasquatch and Big Joe's. Local businesses, such as the Lake Tomahawk Meat Market and the former J&J Sports also supported the event.

Some veterans had never thrown a musky lure, while others were more experienced. Many, he said, also did not know the Camp existed, and were excited to come and spend the weekend there once they heard about it.

One of the veterans, Patrick Hazelton, started musky fishing a few years ago, but this was his first year fishing the Musky



Guide John Michael and veteran Randy Peterson take off from the Lake Tomahawk boat landing for a day of musky fishing during the Musky Moon event.

BECKIE GASKILL/LAKELAND TIMES



Jim Salber of Sportsman's Repair Shop in Mosinee participated in Musky Moon as a guide.



Jeff Stoleson goes over some rules for the weekend for the Musky Moon event, based at Camp American Legion. He partners guides with veterans with guides choosing area lakes on which to fish.



Tike Clough guided Goron Henke and Don Malchow for the Musky Moon event, taking off from the Lake Tomahawk boat landing on a crisp Saturday morning.



Several guides and veterans get ready to chase some big muskies in Lake Tomahawk on Saturday morning of the Musky Moon event, based at Camp American Legion.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

Don Malchow holds his best catch of the weekend, a silver pike he said was approximately 42 inches long. Jeff Stoleson, the organizer of the event, said silver pike are quite rare.

Moon. He spent the weekend staying at the camp and looked forward to get on the water.

Stoleson said, looking to the future, he hopes to have more events at Camp American Legion. He said he hoped to plan a full week where veterans could spend time on the water and just relaxing at the camp. He also looks to create other hunting and fishing events for veterans in years to come also.

Those looking to donate, Stoleson said, could donate directly to Take Em Outdoors. For specific events, such as the Musky Moon

event that is held at Camp American Legion, he asked that anyone looking to donate do so directly to the camp.

"I would rather have the money go directly to them," he said. "They're doing us the favor. So anything that we do raise, I'd like to see it come back to here. We'll take it, but I'd prefer it to come to camp. Chances are, it's not going to just help us, but the other guys that come to camp, too."

Beckie Gaskill may be reached via email at bgaskill@lakelandtimes.com.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

Each veteran received a musky rod from Bear Rods, as well as tackle and other equipment from several events sponsors.

