

Fishing, Fishing, Fishing - *that is what it's all about.*

"Brad's" Leo Lasher United Way Catfish Contest 7/16/2016

by John H. Vargo, Publisher

It is a primeval sport that is usually taught to any child that lives near water, yet there are millions of children that live near water that have no clue as to what fishing really is. Brad Poster, Executive Director, of the United Way Columbia/Greene County has developed a way of bringing together diverse children from all walks of life, rich, poor, disabled and healthy to "fish" for a few hours so that the "spirit" that lives in all children can be brought out and grow and flourish.

Thirty four and a half inches! - Giant Catfish weighed in (the NY State record for catfish is 40"). This catfish was returned to the Hudson River to grow even larger.)

Fishing is one of the simplest yet complicated ways to get something to eat, and is as common to "man" as breathing.



The channel "cats" are getting bigger every year. Shown with the winning catfish is Greg C. His fish was 35.5 inches and weighed 28 pounds. Greg won the \$500 dollars plus 100 dollars from the Columbia Greene Media Challenge.

One lady who was on the weighing committee said, "you know, not all these kids are going to go fishing the rest of their lives from this experience, but maybe one or two in each group will be affected by today and go on to enjoy the sport of fishing in all its wide macerations!" That is what this is all about.

Of course the fact that Brad raised over 10,000 dollars that is distributed to various charitable organizations are a major part of the entire event.

There were over 300 entrants in this years contest. Further each year the catfish that are weighed in are bigger that the previous years weigh in. The prizes are varied, and many, so that each child has the feeling that they are actually being rewarded for their day of fishing.

On Saturday morning July 16, 2016, the fifth annual United Way Leo Lasher Catfish Derby began. A beautiful day, warm, slight breeze at Dutchman's Landing Park, with a double wide free boat ramp provided, the setting was perfect for everyone to gather and exhibit their catfish fishing skills to one an all.

This area of the Hudson River has many residents that are transitioning from rural to suburban. The parents of the children fishing in this contest learned the skills of hunting, fishing and trapping, from their parents. They are proud of their skills and it shows, when, at the end of the day, stringers, tubs, and coolers displayed a wide assortment catfish that were weighed in at the Catfish weigh in station in the park. Once weighed in they were taken over to the "River" only a few yards away to swim away to be caught another day.

It is not only the children that benefit from this event as anyone who attends will tell you, but it is a thoroughly enjoyable and satisfying event for all the volunteers, and contributors of prizes as well.

One group the Hudson River Fisherman's Association of Rochelle Park, NJ have got the volunteering down to a science.

With the support of the Norcross Foundation, beautiful fishing rods and reels are given out to "winners" for largest catfish, etc. However, as an experienced participant at many of these catfish contests up and down the Hudson River I can assure you that the impact of a child getting one of these fishing rod combos goes well beyond the giving of the rod and reel and "sticks" in the minds of the children for the rest of their lives.

Gil Hawkins, Executive Director of the HRFA a fifty-year-old organization says, "We are the last of the major fishing clubs on the Hudson River and the only one that donates all its time an efforts to supporting fishing on the Hudson River. Fishing access is important to the sport of fishing on the Hudson River! If you look at our record we supported and passed through a bill in the New Jersey Legislator that supported the an open access policy along the lower Hudson River and now we are working to stop the blockage of fishing access wherever it occurs on the Hudson River. You folks in Catskill are very fortunate to



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have such a wonderful park, free, with access to everyone who visits, let's hope it stays that way!

To all the volunteers that drove to the catfish contest and spent time with the children, thank you Gil Hawkins, HRFA! Also, we have fought for recreational access to the Hudson River in every community along the entire length of the river since 1966.

There were many groups from the area that participated in the days activities. One, the Berkshire Eisenberg Camp had a group of young 12 to 14 year old girls and their supervisors who fished and actually caught fish... some two at a time.

There were many other groups who attended as well. All and all 60 to 200 catfish were caught and released throughout the day. The Harrington Lumber casting contest had over 30 children entered.

The annual United Way Catfish Contest puts more money into local non-profits than any other local fund raising event. The Derby put 10, 227.00 back into the community by funding 13 local non-profit programs.