



Kalamazoo Public Safety Fishing Program

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2009



Throughout the summer of 2009, Kalamazoo Public Safety Community Policing Unit hosted a Youth Fishing Program. This program was started to introduce inner city youth to the outdoors and to give them an experience that they could share with friends and family. Public Safety aspires to foster new relationships with young citizens through a non-traditional approach.

Programs like this are a great way to keep youth off the streets; it provides them with a safe, fun, and exciting place to interact with others without having to worry about any potential dangers. Through this program, area youth learned basic fishing skills while interacting with their neighborhood Public Safety Officers. The youth gained skills, knowledge, and experience in fishing, while building relationships with Public Safety Officers. The youth were introduced to inland lake fishing at local lakes and took a trip to Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery for an educational component. The youth fishing program took place every Wednesday from June 24th through August 26th from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m.

In February of 2009, Community Policing Officers Sgt. Joe Humphries, Officer David Juday, and Officer Brandon Reardon attended a three-day training at Michigan State University on Project Fish. This program is designed to teach community leaders and volunteers the fine art of fishing and the importance of caring for Michigan's vital aquatic resources. The three officers took the important things they learned and brought it back to Kalamazoo.



Roster

We had 28 kids on the roster with 4 civilian adults. The adult mentors live in the Northside neighborhood and helped out on their own time. Most are retired and love to fish; they have told me that this is a great way to bond with the kids doing something that they like to do. One of the adults who volunteered was a professor from Western Michigan University. CPO Reardon, CPO Weidbrauk and CPO Juday also joined the youth every week for this event.



Getting Started

The first day was one of the biggest challenges. Most of the youth had never fished before, and none of them had tied a hook on a line. All of them met at Public Station 45 and were introduced to the instructors and the equipment. Public Safety was able to purchase 30 fishing poles and 30 tackle boxes filled with gear for them to use. Each youth was assigned a fishing pole and a tackle box. The instructors showed them how to tie a knot by using a line manufactured hook made out of a coat hanger and a piece of nylon rope. The youth caught on very quickly. Next, we showed them how to cast their line. This was very important and the most fun for the young anglers. We took the youth to the parking lot and had them tie on a small rubber fish (used as a weight) to their fishing pole. Instructors set out orange cones for the young anglers to practice casting, trying to hit the cones. This exercise turned more into a competition than a learning exercise. Once the aspiring fishermen were on target, we brought them back into the classroom and taught them about species identification. Once we started fishing on the lakes, we wanted them to know what they were catching and if they were able to keep it, and/or eat the fish.

Area Lakes and Places that we visited

Spring Valley Lake- This lake is in the City of Kalamazoo. The lake is located in Spring Valley Park off of Mt. Olivet. We visited this lake several times. This lake is where several of the kids first learned how to fish and where they caught their first fish. We fished this lake for Blue Gills and Bass. One of the younger anglers caught a 10.5 inch Blue Gill, which is a trophy. The young angler put him back into the water because we were practicing catch and release.



Long Lake- We took the youth to this lake twice; once to the boat launch and once to Ramona Park to fish off the observation deck. We worked with the City of Portage, and their Parks and Recreation Division to make this possible. The City of Portage waived all costs for the youth and had Park Rangers come and introduce themselves to the youth. This was a great learning experience for all. The Rangers introduced themselves and explained to the youth what they did. The Park Rangers thought that the program was great and wanted to get information from Public Safety so they could start their own program.

Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery- The fishing program is designed to build a trusting and respectful relationship between the youth and the police officers, but we also wanted to incorporate an educational component to the program. We took the youth to the Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery where they were taught and shown how the fish start as an egg, and grow through various stages. The youth were then shown how the fish are released to the open waters. Further, they were taught species identification and aquatic preservation. The youth were able to feed the fish from a stocked pond that was located near the Fish Hatchery Headquarters.

Randy's Pond- Randy Vandam invited the youth to fish in his privately stocked pond at his house. Randy is the owner of D&R Sports, and his brother Kevin is a Professional Bass Angler who is well known throughout the world. Mr. Vandam's pond was very beautiful and clear. The kids were really excited to see the fish through the clear water and were amazed as they watched the fish grab their bait. They had a great time catching large Bass and Panfish in his pond. This was probably the highlight of the inland lake fishing portion of the program. One of the kids said, "Fishing here is the best place ever, I just caught the biggest fish I have ever seen." THANKS RANDY!



Lake Michigan

Chartered Salmon Fishing Trip- Fifteen young men attended the end of the year fishing trip to South Haven, MI. The youth and staff boarded five different charter boats and fished for salmon throughout the day. We wanted to give our young anglers the experience of fishing in different habitats so they could see the different species. (Ponds, small inland lakes, large bodies of water, etc.)



All of the youth and staff, (10 Public Safety officers and 3 adult mentors) met at our Public Safety Station 45 at 5:45 a.m. We took vans and trucks full of equipment to South Haven. There, we met the charter boat captains and their boats. The young anglers were assigned three to a boat with two adult staff on each charter boat. The expression on their faces was as if they were looking at a million dollars. Half of the youth had never been to Lake Michigan, or seen a 25 + foot boat. One of the youth was overheard saying, “I did not know that you could sleep on a boat.” It was not long after the boats left their slips that the youth were reeling in 20+ lb. fish. During the trip, each and every kid had a chance to fight and land a large Salmon. While fishing on the big lake, they were provided sandwich’s that were donated by Subway in Parchment, MI. The young men fished for five hours on the lake and then we all met at the boat slips. The officers from Kalamazoo Public Safety bought burgers, brats, and hotdogs to grill back at the boat slips. The youth were able to interact with the boat captains and officers during the BBQ. All of the youth then went to the cleaning station and learned how to clean their fish, in preparation to eat. They could not believe how big the fillets on one fish were. One of the kids yelled loudly, “this could feed my whole family”, as everyone laughed. Each of the youth packaged the fillets in plastic bags placed them in coolers on ice.

Thank You Charter Boat Captains



The following week all of the youth were invited to Louies Trophy House Grill, a long time Northside Neighborhood establishment, for a traditional 'fish boil' cookout. All of the Public Safety staff and adult volunteers attended. The youth were overheard saying that this was the best summer program that they have done. If they completed the program from start to finish, they were rewarded with keeping their fishing poles and tackle boxes.





COSTS

Public Safety sent three officers to a Project Fish Seminar. The seminar was three days long at Michigan State University's Campus and was taught by Mr. Mark Stephens. The seminar cost \$100.00 each, plus the officer's salary for three days.

Public Safety bought 30 fishing poles and 30 tackle boxes with lures and tools for \$1300.00.

Officers provided food, snacks, and drinks to the youth during the trips. This all came out of the officer's own pockets.

The bait, gifts, chartered fishing trip, and tours were all donated by local businesses.

The program was **FREE** to the youth. There was no cost for the youth who joined the program for any of the supplies, transportation, and trips. Also, at the end of the program, the youth were able to keep their fishing poles and tackle boxes as a gift for completing the program.



Thank YOU

The Kalamazoo Public Safety Fishing Program would like to give a special thanks to all of its sponsors and donors, without you, this program would not have been as successful as it was.

CHARTER BOAT CAPTAINS:

Bob Braley from Makin Baykin' Charters

Dan Strong from Mr. Bill Charters

Dave Strong from Strong Performance Charters

Dan Williams from "Sea Dan Go"

Mark Reidenbach from "Got My Weigh Charters"

Each Captain donated an all expense paid chartered fishing trip at South Haven. This was the grand finale for the kids. Most had never seen Lake Michigan and none of them had ever been on a charter boat. This was an experience of a **LIFE TIME** for those kids.

Randy VanDam and D&R sports: Mr. VanDam let the kids come to his personal stocked pond to fish. The kids thought this was a great experience. They were able to catch several large mouth bass, and see several more fish.

SUBWAY: Dave Butler and Kathy Nevelle of Subway in Parchment donated and helped organize the food arrangements for the fishing trip to South Haven. Not only did they make the sandwiches for the kids, but they also provided enough cookies for everyone that went on the trip.

Double L Bait and Tackle: Double L Bait and Tackle provided all of the bait for the kids to use all summer long.

Portage Parks and Recreation: Portage Parks waived all costs for the kids to fish at lakes in Portage.

Mark Stevens and Project Fish: Mark Stevens, who is the Project Fish coordinator, gave us several ideas, tips, and places to look for products, gear, and teaching supplies. For more information please check out the website: www.projectfish.org

Kalamazoo Public Safety Administration and Staff

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