



Longmeadow Chronicles

by Bob Lezinski

THE JOHN BARKMAN MEMORIAL FISHING DERBY

By 7:30 this morning, the drizzle had developed into a steady rain as I made my way to Laurel Park to witness the annual John Barkman Memorial Fishing Derby. I was wondering what sort of a turnout this fifty-plus year old town event would have. As I entered the park, twenty minutes before the 8 AM start time, the banks on both sides



of the pond were lined with anxious anglers. Undaunted by the weather, these young anglers carefully scanned the water's surface, knowing that just beneath lurked over two hundred voracious trout, imported just for the occasion. These weren't just ordinary trout; they were brought in from Sunderland. Everybody knows that Sunderland trout are the feistiest fighting fish anywhere!!



As the eighty or so anglers and their families jockeyed for position, they kept a watchful eye in the direction of Patrolman Bob Parsons. They knew full well that at the precise stroke of eight, Officer Parsons would raise the bullhorn and announce to all that the fishing season had officially opened. At that moment, dozens of bobbers flew into the air, and the 28th Annual John Barkman Memorial Fishing Derby was underway!



The fierce fish did not disappoint. By 8:02, after a tense battle, 10-year old Bryan Kaselouskas had landed the first fish of the day - an 11-3/4 inch brown trout. Bryan brought his catch up to the tent where Director of Recreation Department Bari Thomas and her staff measured and recorded its size. Soon thereafter, the water was boiling with thrashing trout as other anglers hooked into the fearsome game fish.

Amazingly, I saw no crossed lines or bobbers stuck up in tree branches. These kids are good!





For over two hours, the battles raged. Wave after wave of anglers brought their catches up to the tent to register them, hoping to garner a prize. And prizes there was no shortage of. Longmeadow High School Key Club volunteers Chris Capurso and Rich Camerota meticulously measured all the fish, which ranged in size from 6-12 inches

Staff volunteers Crissy Alexopoulos and Don Richton dispensed coffee, cocoa and baked goods to supportive family members. Barely visible because of his self-proclaimed "undercover" status, Park Foreman Tony Marchese was a welcome and reassuring presence. You never know when the combination of eighty or so adrenalin-charged anglers and two-hundred fierce fighting fish is going to erupt into total chaos!



I asked several youngsters what they would serve with their trout. Most were oblivious to the fact that the fish were intended to be eaten. Others suggested everything from M&M's to hamburger as a side dish. Six-year old Joshua Benson had other ideas. His plan was to rush his catch home ASAP and put it in the fish tank, where it would live happily ever after.

Shortly after 10, Bari and staff started the distribution of prizes, which consisted of fishing-related items. The results are below. As Bari said, "Everybody is a winner here. Everyone gets a prize." Indeed, there were prizes to spare.



AND THE WINNERS ARE.....

Boys and Girls (6 AND UNDER)

1st fish caught

Alec Metropoulos (6) Nicole Pozzuto (4)

Biggest Fish

Darrell Cavlan (6) Olwia Shapiro (5)

1st To Catch 3 Fish

Ryan Carmody (4) Mary Miller (4)

Boys and Girls (7-11)

1st Fish Caught

Bryan Kaselouskas (10) Taylor Rooney (9)

Biggest Fish

Matt Schiaffino (10) Catherne Camerota (9)

1st To Catch 3 Fish

Alex Shapiro (8) Alexa Dunn (9)

Boys (12 & UP)

1st Fish Caught

Greg Asher (14)

Biggest Fish

Blake Metropoulis (12)

1st To Catch 3 Fish

John Lepper (12)

JOHN BARKMAN

The fishing derby in Laurel Park has been going on for over a half-century. Instrumental in its organization and development into a long-standing Longmeadow Rite of Spring was John Barkman. As a volunteer, John generously gave of his time and knowledge to nurture this unique opportunity for family fellowship. As a longstanding member of the Longmeadow Police Department, John Barkman was a familiar and beloved figure around town. When he passed away during the early eighties, he was still an active officer and possessed badge number one. It was deemed appropriate that from that time forward this annual event would officially be known as The John Barkman Memorial Fishing Derby. Today's tourney was the 28th.

I got this information pretty much first hand. You see, John Barkman was the uncle and father-de-facto of Officer Bob Parsons. Bullhorn in hand, Bob is proud beyond words to carry on the tradition his uncle started so many years ago. Himself a self-effacing man, it was Director Bari Thomas who was quick to come forward and sing Bob's praises as a volunteer and veritable backbone of the event in its present form. Always the first to arrive and last to leave, Officer Bob Parsons is on stake-out the night before to prevent poachers from spoiling the youngster's fun. When I left, he was emptying trash containers. He is probably still there.

LET THE FEASTING BEGIN!!!!

Send any comments to webmaster@longmeadow.org

