

Able Fishing Coordinator Dedicated To Providing Activity Opportunities

The thrill of reeling in a fish is a rush that has made anglers out of countless people over the years. For the second year, the Able Games, put on as part of the Commonwealth Games, has had a fishing tournament open only to those who have a physical or mental disability.

Of course, medals are given out – gold and silver in the categories of biggest fish and most fish caught. Everyone gets a bronze.



On July 18, a group of 32 people, ages 5 through 75, caught fish from the pond owned by the Lyn-Dan Heights Ruritan Club in Campbell County. Moore’s Electric Co. of Altavista sponsored the event, supplying employees and family members to volunteer and participate in the festivities. Virginia Amateur Sports supplied snacks, drinks, and the most necessary items of all the worms.

Jeff Reynolds of Rustburg is the event coordinator. He has been running sporting events for special needs individuals for eight years, having been involved for 18 years. He coordinates t-ball, basketball, and fishing. Basketball, played in the winter in the gym at West Branch Elementary School in Campbell County, often it turns into whiffle ball or kickball for a change of pace.

The father of twin boys who are autistic and non-verbal, Reynolds was hooked the first time he saw them take part in a t-ball game for those with special needs when they were just 5 years old. That was 2006. He has been working with the special needs community ever since. “I want to give them a chance to get up off the couch and do something. Have fun. Get exercise,” Reynolds said.

Fishing is an inclusive activity, he said, because there is a chance for the angler to be an integral part of the process of landing the fish.

“Some can’t actually cast the bait, but they can reel it in. Once the fish is hooked, they can get it in,” he said.

The exhilaration is the same.

For the caregivers and people who help, the fun of being part of a successful day on the pond is just as rewarding. The real victories of events in the Able Games are not the number of fish caught or the competitions won, the wins come by surmounting the challenges faced that create the special needs.

Reynolds pitches to the players in baseball, letting those who need use a tee, but working with each of them to grow their confidence and skill enough to swing the bat.

“I had 42 participants sign up for spring t-ball and only two hit off a tee,” he said.

After 40 years working for Kroger, Reynolds took full retirement at age 55 so he can devote more time to helping his athletes. VAS makes one Thursday evening of fishing incredibly special out of many he hosts in the summer, but he’ll be out there by the pond regardless. As the event grows, the venue may change. Reynolds would be fine with lining the banks of a Leesville Lake reservoir with the people who rarely get a chance to experience the happiness of landing a fish. With his help and the backing of the Commonwealth Games and Able Games, the sky is the limit.