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Young anglers sought — Howell fishing derby aims

By Rick Shepich
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Brighton residents Kim Panosso and Marcel Veenstra are hoping the success of last year's inaugural Howell Fishing Derby, paired with a bigger prize package this year, will bring the kids out in droves.

Last year, 31 kids lined the Shiawassee Park pond at Town Commons and every participant caught a fish before the two-hour competition concluded.



For the second annual derby, Panosso and Veenstra are hoping for a much bigger turnout. With the word-of-mouth publicity from last year's participants and all that they have to offer this year, chances are good that they'll get it.

"I think last year the kids really enjoyed it and had a great time," said Veenstra, a professional fisherman. "I think they're going to all

spread the news and we started pushing it a little stronger this year because everybody had such a good time last year."

"We have bigger trophies this year ... reel-and-rod combos and miscellaneous tackle," Panosso said. "Every kid that participates will get something."

The event is completely free thanks to various sponsors, including Town Commons as well as some of Veenstra's sponsors on the pro fishing circuit.

The derby will be held Saturday from 1-3 p.m. Winners will be announced at 3:15 p.m. There is no pre-registration, so anyone interested can simply show up at Shiawassee Park between 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. to get registered.



Photo by GIL

13-year-old K fisherman Ma Commons SF

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In addition to the free fishing derby and prizes, there will be hot dogs and chips for lunch, also at no cost. There will also be an old-fashioned lemonade stand with all the proceeds going to the Livingston County Humane Society.

Participants will compete in four age groups: 5-and-under, 6-to-8, 9-to-11 and 12-to-14, with winners decided by the longest fish caught.

However, Panosso said the derby isn't as much about the competition as it is about introducing kids to fishing and making sure they have a positive fishing experience.

"(The derby) really came about because we are really into fishing and our goal is just to get more kids into fishing," she said. "It's a good path for kids to go down. If we can walk away even getting one or two kids into fishing, we've achieved our goal."

Veenstra agrees and wants to see as many kids as possible catch a fish, and get excited about it in the process.

"I want to see kids screaming and yelling, lines getting tangled, chaos and excitement," Veenstra laughed. "They want to leave there with stories to tell."

The pond, which is strictly catch-and-release, is in good condition according to Panosso, and there should be plenty of good-sized fish to go after.

"The pond has been managed real well," Panosso said. "We fish it quite often because it's a great pond for kids to get started in. It keeps them busy because there's a lot of different fish in it."

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