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## Derby packs the pond — Second annual Howell fish free family fun

By Rick Shepich  
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

HOWELL — Three-year-old Alaina Saunders of Fowlerville arrived at the measuring table in a stroller.

The 17 1/2-inch large mouth bass that she had just hooked arrived in a bucket of water.



Saunders, one of the youngest and smallest participants at the second annual Howell fishing derby, hooked the largest fish of the day at the competition. She won the under-5 age group with the catch, which older sister Jourdan Kamieniecki helped her reel in.

"She started screaming when she was reeling it in," Jourdan said.

A bit intimidated by the size of the fish, Alaina covered in her stroller as the fish was measured until pro fisherman Marcel Veenstra put her at ease.

As everyone surrounding the table celebrated her catch, Alaina broke into a smile and exclaimed, "I did it!"

For her efforts, Alaina won a rod-and-reel combo and a trophy that was more than half her size.

"She hooked it and started to reel it in," said Mike Saunders, Alaina's grandfather who brought her and Jourdan to the event. "We started helping her and I think she got scared from all of our excitement."



Photo by GIL

Jessica DiGià annual fishing known profes kids of all age

"That's just what we're looking for," Veenstra said of Alaina's catch. "These are stories these kids are going to remember for the rest of their lives. They're all going to remember that fish splashing around in the water out there."

Jourdan nearly equaled her younger sister by catching a 16 1/2-inch large mouth bass. That catch earned her first prize in the 6-8 age group.

Participation in the event, which drew around 42 kids last year between the ages of 3 and 14, exploded this year as nearly 150 kids surrounded the Shiawassee Park pond in Town Commons.

"The only good thing about last year's derby compared to this one is that I got to spend a little more one-on-one time with the kids," said Veenstra, who fishes on the FLW tour. "There was no time to leave the weigh-in table this time and I wish I could've spent a little more time directly with the kids."

While Veenstra was busy all afternoon measuring fish, friends Rob Bakeman, as well as Sean Duggan and Ryan Griffiths made their way around the pond helping kids fish.

"The first kid today wouldn't touch a worm and was more interested in the dragonflies," said Bakeman, who was one of a number of volunteers from Wonderland Marine West in Howell that helped with the event. "He caught his first bass and then he was zeroed in. All he cared about was catching fish after that."

While the number of kids participating is one measure of the event's success, there were a couple other factors that made the day even better.

"Seven fish longer than 16 inches have been caught today," organizer Kim Panosso said. "Everybody's had a lot of fun."

Fish were measured by length, not weight, and the top three placers in each age group (under 5, 6-8, 9-11 and 12-14) each won a rod-and-reel combo and a trophy. Every participant, however, walked away with something. Hats, T-shirts, fishing line and lures, among other things, were given away. Hot dogs and chips were also provided for lunch at no cost.

Veenstra rallied sponsors Yamaha, Shakespeare, All-Star, Luger and Spro for many of the prizes, and local sponsors such as Wonderland Marine West, Town Commons, KD Outdoors, American Title and Vanguard Homes all helped put on the event at no cost to participants.

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