

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Report

John A. Arway, Executive Director

www.fishandboat.com



My First Catch and the First Catch Center

There are times when we get so distracted by life that we sometimes forget about the very roots of our own childhood.

I recently reviewed the number of PFBC Angler Award applications for First Catches for the past two years and discovered that trout (rainbow, brown, brook, golden and steelhead) accounted for 58 percent (53 out of 91) of First Fish Certificates presented by the PFBC for first fish catches.

I then started thinking about why I got hooked on fishing as a child. My first fish was a bluegill sunfish caught from a small wooden boat dock at Cranberry Glade Lake in Somerset County. I was using a telescoping steel bait-casting rod equipped with a Shakespeare bait-casting reel, spooled with black cotton braided fishing line connected to a wooden fluorescent orange egg bobber, tied to a number 8 baitholder hook holding a small redworm, which was grown and cultured in the compost pile next to our cabin.

Although I was only four years old when I caught my first fish, I distinctly remember that setup since I used it for at least the next 10 years to catch bluegills, pumpkinseed sunfish, black crappies, yel-

low perch and largemouth bass out of the same lake that I caught my first fish. Those memories and many more that I have created with family and friends over the years keep me an avid angler today.

I am not one of the majority of anglers who come and go from the sport of fishing because of the competing demands for my time. I fish because it is part of me. It is a way of life and not something that I can turn on and off depending on how I feel, or because I am distracted to do other things that prove to be more exciting to others who try to get me to stray.

Given that Pennsylvania has over 86,000 miles of streams and reservoirs, over 4,000 lakes and reservoirs and an unreported number of ponds, which support tremendous opportunities for someone to catch their first fish, we developed an idea for a First Catch Center in partnership with the Recreation Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), Boat U.S. Foundation, Pocono Raceway, The Rest of PA, BassPro Shops and Tracker Marine. Pennsylvania is home to the nation's fifth largest city, Philadelphia, at 1.1 million people; some of whom certainly might want to catch their first fish!



Mark Nale Photo

Forge National Park and the spring stocked trout fishing opportunities offered by Wis-sahickon, Pennypack, Perkiomen, Unami, Skippack, Manatawny and many other regional streams and lakes, and it seems like the perfect urban setting for an experiment to get more people fishing.

This First Catch Center concept was developed in response to a call for a pilot program. Knowing that fishing and boating were lacking what other sports like baseball and golf had: a nation-wide development program to foster the next generation of participants, this pilot effort will test our ability to do the same.

There was also a recognition that more people were leaving rural areas where fishing and boating were more popular, in favor of more densely-populated urban areas where outdoor recreation opportunities seem scarce.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission was lucky enough to be chosen as one of two national sites, along with Fishing's Future based in Texas.

PFBC's approach is novel. A mobile platform (vans, trailers and a boat) designed to travel inside and outside the city to waters that provide the greatest potential for future anglers to experience their first catch while staff provide hands-on opportunities, so kids and adults alike can learn basic fishing and boating skills along with conservation ethics. The locations mentioned above give a rich backdrop



First Catch Photos of Director Arway's Grandkids

within which to work.

This is an example of the type of excitement we are attempting to create in both Pennsylvania and across the nation as part of RBFF's 60 in 60 campaign. The campaign challenges states to increase participation in fishing to 60 million anglers in 60 months. The clock started for the campaign in 2016 when national participation in fishing was estimated at 35.8 million people (2016 National Survey of Fishing,

Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau).

Each state was challenged to increase participation to reach the national goal using a variety of innovative recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) techniques. Pennsylvania's assigned targeted goal was 39,833 anglers. RBFF actually developed a toolkit for states to use to recruit new anglers, reactivate dormant ones and retain

existing ones. States are working together to attempt to understand the problem and develop solutions to reach 60 in 60.

Will it work? We don't know, but we are certainly going to try to change the trends, get more people fishing in Pennsylvania and have some fun along the way! Check back periodically at www.fishandboat.com for information on events scheduled in and around Philadelphia.

PFBC

PFBC Executive Director Arway Announces Retirement

July 31, 2018 - Retired friends have told me that you will know when the time has come to retire. I now understand. I have advised Board leadership that I will be retiring from the position of Executive Director of the PA Fish and Boat Commission effective 02 November 2018. I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Board of Commissioners, Boating Advisory Board members, fellow PFBC staff, colleagues and friends of my planned retirement. Today's announcement should provide the Board sufficient time to conduct the necessary search for qualified individuals and appoint someone before my departure. I have advised President Hussar that I will do everything I can to make the transition to a new Director as simple as possible.

I have been with the agency for over 38 years, during which time I have had many motivating and rewarding experiences. Working for the PFBC has been a privilege, nothing less. Never did I think, back in the fall of 1979 when I stopped by the PFBC's Pleasant Gap Office and visited with Jack Miller and Ronni Tibbott to discuss a possible semi-skilled laborer position working on fish habitat projects, that I would wake up 38 years later as the retiring Executive Director of an agency I always respected and admired.

I would like to thank all of the people both inside and outside the agency for their support and assistance over the years. I have worked with the best of the best. I feel truly blessed to have been able to serve by your sides while we worked to protect, conserve and enhance our Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide

Commonwealth anglers and boaters with first class fishing and boating opportunities. Our list of accomplishments is long and will be remembered in the next history book as our legacy in the proud tradition of the second oldest fish or wildlife agency in the nation. Bravo Zulu!

When Commission President Tom Shetterly called and offered me the job as Executive Director over eight years ago, the vision I had of the position was soon replaced by the reality of the unusual blend of politics, science, state and national public policy, economics, and social media and personal interactions with anglers and boaters all across the Commonwealth. My only regret is that I failed to achieve a sustainable future for the agency and its programs.

The plan we created eight years ago put us on course to control our own destiny. We executed painful cuts across programs to be able to the pay rising expenses of government. We saved sufficient revenues to be able to sustain operations until others provide funding to satisfy the public service demands of a government business. I leave the agency in good hands and am confident that the Board and PFBC staff will maintain the courage and resolve to continue to do the right things for the right reasons for not only the current generation of PA anglers and boaters, but more importantly for generations yet to come. The plan for the future should include the defense of agency independence, living within our means and not spending more than we earn. This simple formula will insure continued agency success far into the future.

I know that my leaving will present

challenges for a new director, but will also create opportunities. I am preparing plans for my replacement that outline in detail, each step that is needed to complete the tasks at hand. I will also be available to assist my replacement in an orderly transition in any way that I can.

During my retirement, I will be enjoying the bounties provided by Penn's waters and woods. I may even stray outside our state border from time to time to see if the grass is really greener in other places. I will remain available for advice, counsel or friendly discussion in case there is anything I can do to assist you or the agency.

I'll be spending more time in a town called Lynch, in the middle of the Allegheny National Forest. It's the camp with the green metal roof and I'll be the one sitting by the campfire surrounded by an army of grandkids roasting marshmallows and identifying constellations in the night sky. To fulfill a life's dream and begin a new journey spending time with family and friends, I am truly grateful.

Thank you all very much for the wonderful memories. I look forward to following the continued successes of this great agency. It has been a true privilege and honor to end my professional career as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Carpe diem!

Your Director,

><(John{°>

Do Your Duty and Fear No One..... R. W. Abele

PFBC

