

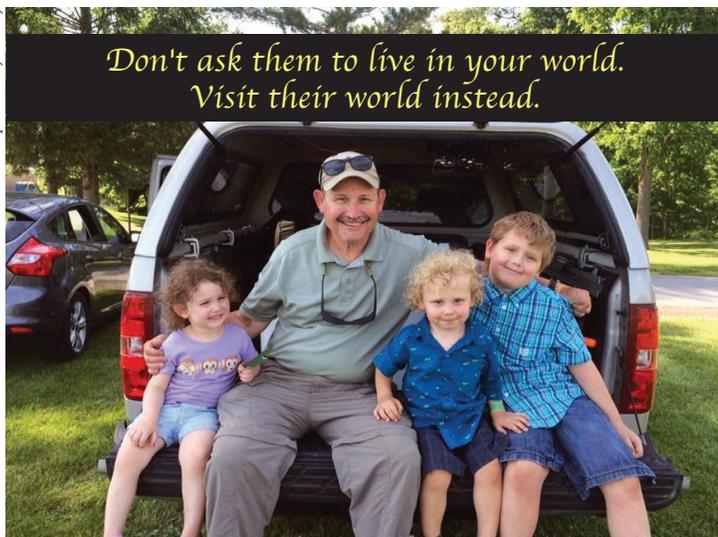
Straight TALK

by **John A. Arway**

Executive Director
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

A Contrast of Generations

Photo-Caitlyn Arway



*Don't ask them to live in your world.
Visit their world instead.*

Executive Director John A. Arway with his grandchildren (left to right) Elliana, Leif and Xander.

I am given the opportunity to deliver an Executive Director's report at every quarterly business meeting of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's (PFBC's) Board of Commissioners. I typically use the time to update the Board, staff and visitors on my past, present and future activities. However, there are times when I change the pace and give a report based on an important current events topic.

At our April Board meeting, I played two video clips that showed the difference in two generations of Pennsylvania anglers. My generation was represented by the theme song from the Andy Griffith Show (1960 – 1968). While some of us remember Andy and Opie walking side by side down a dirt road whistling a song, we may not all know that song is titled "The Fishin' Hole." The actual lyrics to the song perfectly describe my memories of growing up fishing. I grew up in the baby boomer generation. A generation who now have senior lifetime licenses and will hopefully be using them for many years to come. A recent Pennsylvania State Data Center report projects that we will have

about 500,000 fewer people under 60 years of age in 2025 than we had in 2005. However, the number of people 60 and older will increase by about 50 percent, from approximately 2.5 million to more than 3.7 million. Unfortunately, most seniors* don't help pay for the goods and services that they continue to receive annually from PFBC. At the same time, we are losing fishing license buyers to the senior ranks at a greater rate than we are gaining young anglers.

The second video that I presented was one of Mike Iaconelli, a popular professional bass angler, performing his celebrations after catching fish in a variety of bass tournaments. Ike's success and antics in front of the camera represent how some of today's new generation of anglers get attracted to the sport of fishing. Today's anglers may be motivated to fish, because they see competitive professional sport fishing as a way to earn a successful living pursuing their passion.

The purpose of my showing the two different videos was to illustrate why PFBC needs to change with the times to stay relevant. We can't continue to market to Opie and Andy when younger generations have much different expectations from our sport. Recent research tells us that most anglers don't fish to harvest. They fish for social reasons, so they can get together with family and friends to enjoy the outdoors. In fact, if you haven't noticed angler behaviors changing over time, you haven't been paying attention. I see more anglers practicing catch and release today than ever before.

In 2016, the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) created the "60 in 60" challenge. A challenge to state fisheries agencies across the nation to increase national sales of fishing licenses from currently 46 million anglers to 60 million anglers in 60 months (2021). The goal for Pennsylvania is 39,833 fishing licenses per year or approximately 200,000 fishing licenses over 5 years. So, how will states meet and hopefully exceed this challenge?

It is a strategy called R3 (Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation). We recently began implementing the first phase of our plan when we promoted Amidea Daniel to coordinate Youth and Women Fishing Programs. Amidea is a member of the new generation and has hit the ground running. She has the interest and passion necessary to test and implement programs that "move the needle" for this important part of our recruitment challenge. We have also been working with Dr. Judd Michael and his students from Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Smeal College of Business to not only develop an agency business plan but also create a marketing and outreach plan that will include all segments of our angling and boating community.

Recruitment involves getting people who have never fished interested in fishing. Pennsylvania is home to over 12.8 million people, and we estimate 1.1 million people fish. That means 11.7 million people don't fish.

It is important that we create a message that explains how simple, affordable and fun fishing can be so those who have an interest will try it and get hooked.

Retention is keeping those of us who fish fishing. This is easier said than done since only three of 100 license buyers purchase a license every year for 10 years in a row. We have a high drop-out rate, and our challenge is to lower that rate by making things more convenient for our current customers. We began our plan when the legislature gave us the ability to sell multi-year licenses (MYLs). We created 3, 5 and now 10 year licenses and discovered that 50 percent of those who purchased a MYL would not have otherwise bought one every year. They also fished twice as much as they would have if they hadn't bought one.

The last R of the 3Rs is **reactivation**, which should be our simplest challenge. This involves reactivating the anglers who come and go from our sport primarily, because they have other activities that compete for their leisure time. They already have the equipment since they fished before, they have the interest since they fished before, but they just don't have the time to fish. We have stepped up our marketing and outreach efforts and have teamed up with the Pittsburgh Pirates, Pocono Raceway, Minor League Baseball teams around the Commonwealth, Penn State University and our industry partners like BassPro Shops, Cabela's, FishUSA and many others. The idea is to get our message in front of as many people as possible and get them fishing again.

I am confident that we can meet and likely exceed our RBFF goal of selling 200,000 fishing licenses by 2021. In fact, I believe that we can get back to our peak license sales volume of 1.2 million in 1990. We must work harder and cross generational and geographical boundaries with our messages, so our children and grandchildren can appreciate the bond that fishing created for those of us in my generation.

See you on the water.

Your Director,

><(John{(<

***Senior lifetime license holders who purchased their licenses as of January 1, 2015, are required to purchase a trout/salmon permit each year that the license holder desires to fish for trout.**



The mission of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources, and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

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The Andy Griffith Show opening sequence including the song, "The Fishin' Hole."

photo:www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Andy_Griffith_Show



Toyota Pro Angler Mike Iaconelli holds up the champion's trophy for the 2014 Bassmaster Elite Series event at the Delaware River before heading out into the Philadelphia crowd to share the excitement with his fans.

photo:Steve Saito/www.mikeiaconelli.com/mike_iaconelli_photo.php?id=1181

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