

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Summer 2001

Big Bass Highlight Children's Fishing Derby

by Jack Henke

It rained on Saturday, it threatened on Sunday, but the weather failed to dampen the spirits of hundreds of participants in the Oneida Lake Association's annual "Take A Kid Fishing Derby." This year's contest, headquartered at Brewerton Sports on June 23 and 24, attracted over 300 young anglers and equal numbers of adult sponsors, who guided the young Isaac Waltons in pursuit of our lake's ichthyological bounty.

The catch mirrored current trends in Oneida Lake's fish populations. Only two walleyes were entered. A good number of sunfish and rock bass flopped atop the judges' table. Anglers boarded many

impressive chain pickerel. These fish, common in our lake until the 1920's, are experiencing a population explosion. Increased water clarity has caused significant growth of shallow water weeds - ideal pickerel habitat. The largest pickerel measured 25 inches.

Contest judges measured scores of robust large and smallmouth bass. One family brought in a "stringer full" of bass and reported that they had caught and released double that number. They stopped fishing only because they ran out of bait! Bragging rights bass of both species exceeded 17 inches.

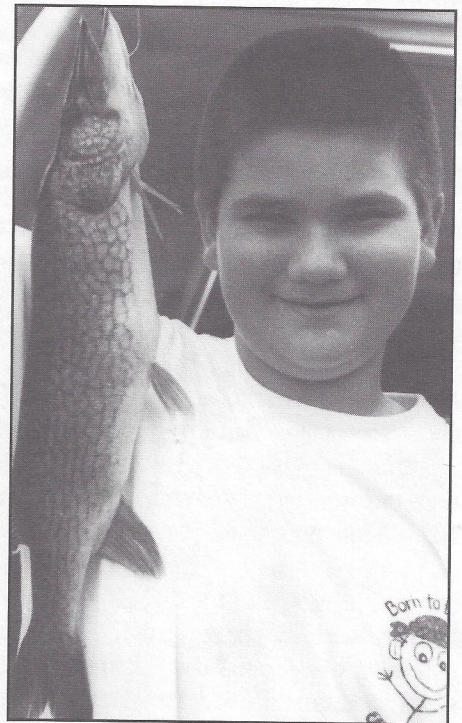
Brewerton Sports overflowed with the angling fraternity at prize-awarding time. Andrew Simonette's 22 1/2 inch and Adam Sacco's 19 inch walleyes captured the pike prizes. The impressive bass entries read as follows: for children ages 6 and under - Jordan Berti and Nathan Budge tied with 17 3/4 inch fish. In the 7 - 9 year old division, Laura Krause captured honors with an 18 incher. Christopher Therry boated an 18 incher to lead the 10 - 12 year old field. Ashley Hanlon caught the biggest bass of the day, an 18 1/4 inch beauty, and won the 13 - 15 year old competition.

Steve Rogers, Brewerton Sports' owner and tournament chairman, summed up the Association's tournament philosophy. "Our children are our future," stated Rogers, "And we have an obligation to show the details and joys of Oneida Lake's fishing to them. What was

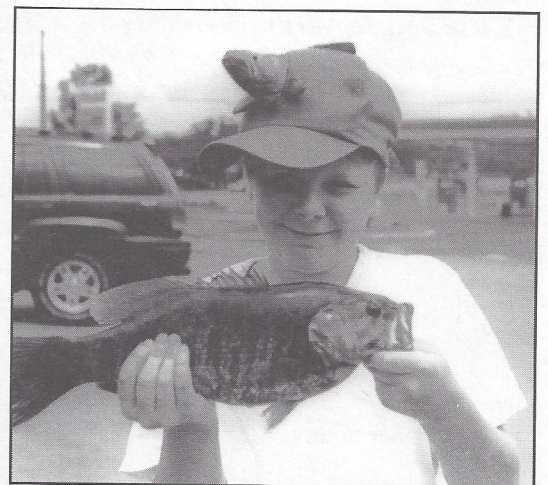
given to us must be shared with them." Pass on Oneida's legacy - take a child fishing this summer.



Erica Freeman, Josh Plonka, and Alec Rood (left to right) proudly wear the medals they received for catching prize-winning fish.



Top photo: Jordan Latocha, from Phoenix, shows off a nice pickerel. Bottom photo: Shawn Calabria, of Big Bay, displays his hefty smallmouth.



President's Message

Let me take this opportunity to discuss the decline of Oneida Lake's walleye population and the role played by the OLA in attempting to reverse this tragedy.

The drop began in 1989. The DEC, because of past fluctuations in walleye numbers, adopted a "wait and see" attitude. They hoped that successful year classes would carry the population through the 1990's. The 1991 year class was a good one, but it was the only decent class in that decade. It could not, by itself, maintain a high walleye population.

The Oneida Lake Association, gravely concerned with the situation, pressed for explanations and solutions.

In 1998, the DEC's Division of Fish and Wildlife set up a series of meetings between the OLA, Cornell Field Station biologists, and representatives of the Division. High level DEC personnel attended the meetings.

DEC and Cornell officials provided data about the walleye situation to several OLA Directors. The OLA representatives articulated your concerns. The fact that the OLA speaks for over 4,000 people gives it a persuasive voice at meetings like these. Every one of you contributes to this clout.

The general consensus was that our walleyes' diminishing numbers were initially caused by cormorants' feeding. State officials pointed out that, under present Federal Government guidelines, all that could be done to control these birds was now occurring. The OLA strongly believes that more must be done and has detailed its positions to the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Fish and Wildlife.

Adult walleye numbers plummeted from 850,000 in 1989 to just over 200,000 in 1997. Adult yellow perch counts fell from over 2,000,000 in 1989 to 800,000 in 1997. People at the meetings agreed that the problem centered on how to restore fish populations.

Increasing walleye fry stocking and stocking fingerling fish are two reasonable solutions that were suggested and, in part, implemented. Fry stocking has been bolstered from 105 million, prior to the meetings, to 150 million today.

Two sizes of fingerlings have been proposed - two inch and six-inch fish. The DEC had stringent criteria for fingerling stocking. In order to receive walleye fingerlings, a body of water must be regulated by the "18 inch, three fish per day" limits. Also, the water will not get fingerlings if it contains an abundance of walleye fry after the spawning season. In addition, the body of water must have sufficient perch fry to provide feed for the young walleyes.

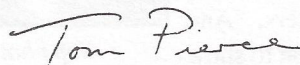
It is difficult for lakes to meet these criteria. The OLA, however, stressed the severity of the Oneida Lake problem and pushed the DEC to set aside its rules. The Department responded positively and waived the requirements.

Oneida Lake received over 150 million walleye fry in April. Over 200,000 two inch fingerlings were released in the lake in June. Around 100,000 six inch walleyes are slated for stocking. The DEC committed half of their smaller fingerlings and all of their larger fish to their Oneida Lake walleye restoration effort. We can all thank them for their commitment.

I firmly believe that this would not have occurred without the pressure of 4,000 OLA members.

Just imagine - what more could we accomplish with 8,000 members? Sign up your friends and neighbors. Help us help Oneida Lake.

It is an honor to serve as your new OLA President.



Thomas Pierce
President - Oneida Lake Association

The Oneida Lake Association Inc.

Founded in 1945

The *Bulletin* is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the Association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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observe the
"rules of the road"

Editorial

On this page we note the establishment of the "I-81 Fishing Access Sites" at Brewerton. The State Departments of Transportation and Conservation deserve accolades for their efforts. Public access to Oneida Lake has been enhanced.

At our lake's east end, however, the opposite situation has occurred. For decades, anglers have been able to launch small boats on the south end of Sylvan Beach's Barge Canal bridge. New York State rebuilt the canal's retaining wall along Sylvan Beach in the 1990's. Last year, the state reconstructed Verona Beach's canal front. Both piers are superbly crafted and, together, they create an excellent harbor. When the Verona Beach part was rebuilt, however, the state blocked the public boat launch.

The OLA contacted state officials and asked why this occurred. They responded that, during the summer, launching jet skis and boats at this site created hazardous congestion. Sylvan Beach's harbor is a busy place and the launch simply didn't fit during peak times.

We understand the state's point and we concur that dangerous navigational conditions must be avoided. However, the Association is committed to the privilege of public access to our lake and losing the launch diminishes this right.

We see a solution that can satisfy all. Close the launch from mid-May through mid-September. This time frame witnesses Oneida Lake's maximum pleasure craft traffic. Open the launch from ice out until mid-May and from mid-September to winter's onset. These times are best for angling and boat traffic is low.

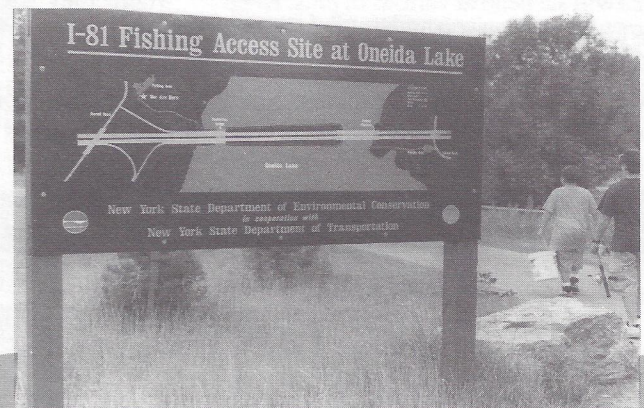
The public's right to enjoy Oneida Lake must not be abridged.

New Fishing Access Sites At Brewerton

A major victory for Oneida Lake shore anglers occurred in June when the "I-81 Fishing Access Sites" opened. These sites are on Bartell Road, across from Brewerton Sports, and on County Route 37 at the Route 81 bridge. The Bartell Road facility includes a beautifully paved walkway leading to a bridge that connects the shore with the base of the southernmost abutment of Route 81's Oneida Lake bridge. Pavement winds around the abutment, giving anglers easy opportunities to fish both the Oneida River and Lake sides of the bridge. A spacious parking lot accommodates fifty vehicles. The Route 37 site also provides walkway access to the lake. Its parking lot holds about 20 cars.

There are no trash receptacles at the sites as yet. The OLA encourages anglers to police the grounds and carry out as much litter as possible.

Bass and panfish are commonly caught near the bridge during summer. Fall's cooler temperatures will chill the lake and bring evening migrations of walleyes. Autumn's night fishing should be superb.



On Shore - Off Shore

Check out Upper South Bay on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. The Oneida Lake Sailing Club holds regattas and, backdropped by sunset lighting, their graceful vessels create beautiful scenes.

The Verona Beach State Park commands great vistas of Upper South Bay and the lake in general. While walkways and trails crisscross the park, the promenade along the beach attracts the most visitors. You can park your vehicle for free in Verona Beach's main lot after 6 p.m.

You've probably seen many dead carp this summer. Cornell biologists tell us that a virus, that only affects carp, has been killing them. The virus may have entered Oneida Lake via the Great Lakes.

Need to fax something to the OLA? Our number is 315-675-8226. And don't forget our web address - <http://web.a-znet.com/ola>. You'll always find interesting stories, articles, and general lake information. Director Chuck Abate does a superb job updating the site.

Don't forget to observe the "rules of the road" when navigating our lake this summer. Boat traffic gets congested, especially at Brewerton and Sylvan Beach. Courtesy and safety make for enjoyable voyages - for all concerned.

Out for leisurely drive? Stop by the Oneida Hatchery in Constantia. They're raising paddlefish and sturgeon, as well as walleyes, now. Their exhibits are fascinating and they're open every day, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

A Bureau of Fish and Wildlife official informs us that the Bureau's Environmental Impact Statement regarding the cormorant problem may be issued this fall. The sooner, the better. Cormorants continue to ravage game fish populations in Oneida Lake and throughout the United States. The birds have a dire economic impact on New York State and on other regions as well.

Walleye Trolling Techniques

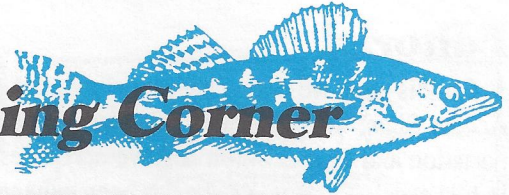
by Captain Ray Brown

We use two methods for walleye trolling – downriggers and planerboards. Downriggers are winch and cable devices used to lower a cannonball weight, with fishing line attached, into deep water. The ball keeps the line and lure at the exact depth you choose. I use a “Black Model” release. The line easily pulls free and you can play fish in a normal way.

Because downrigger wires and cannonballs tend to spook walleyes, I run my lures well behind the ball. I never run them closer than 40 feet and I prefer 120 feet. Try to keep your lures on or near the bottom. As the season progresses, walleyes will suspend at various depths. Keep the lures above the fish.

Lures proven to work well are Thundersticks, jointed Rapalas, Shad Raps, Dixie Spinners, and flutter spoons.

The OLA Fishing Corner



Thundersticks and Rapalas dive below the ball, but you should add some splitshot ahead of Dixies and flutter spoons to get them below.

Planerboards are floating devices that move out and away from the boat. The better boards connect to a mast on your boat via a tow line. Smaller “in-line planers” attach directly to your fishing line. Fishing lines attach to the tow line with “White Off Shore” releases. Lines can be spaced along the tow line. When a fish strikes, line is pulled from the release.

Planerboards are useful because noise from the motor herds fish to the side, where they encounter the lures. These boards can run 150 feet from the sides of the boat.

Depending on the season, we use different methods to put lures in the fish

zone. Most lures used in Oneida Lake only dive to 20-25 feet. When walleyes are deeper than this we use lead core line, dipsy divers, jet planers, “Big Jon” mini disks, and bottom bouncers to get the lures to the fish.

Trolling with the waves seems to produce more strikes. If you troll in an “S” pattern, you’ll give your lures more action.

Think of the lake’s water as a grid pattern. Put lures at different depths until you find the active fish zone. Match lures with those that are working with other rods in the boat. Trolling is a proven, productive way to take Oneida Lake’s walleyes.

Good fishing to you!

Ray Brown is an Oneida Lake charter captain.

Oneida Lake’s Unsung Sunfish

by Tony VanDeValk

The sunfish family is made up of about 30 different species in North America. Technically, it includes largemouth and smallmouth bass. When we refer to “sunfish” in Oneida Lake, we are usually talking about pumpkinseeds and bluegills. Some anglers give rock bass, another member of this fish family, the “sunfish” label. These fish provided many of us with our first angling experiences. They are famous for their eagerness to take bait, their scrappy fighting style, and their great taste.

With increased weed growth in recent years, Oneida Lake may experience an increase in sunfish numbers. In the spring, male sunfish can be observed constructing nests in shallow water, especially in the lake’s bays. These nests are shallow depressions in the lake’s bottom. After female sunfish deposit eggs, males fertilize them and guard the nest against predators for up to two weeks. Young sun-

fish hatch during that time. After this occurs, the young fish and the males leave the nesting area.

Once spawning concludes, sunfish tend to remain in the shallower areas of the lake, near structure such as weed beds, brush, and docks. Later, many move to deeper water and good fishing occurs on rocky reefs and by aquatic vegetation.

Pumpkinseeds and bluegills rarely exceed 10 inches, but rock bass may reach larger sizes. These fishes’ diets include insects and other tiny invertebrates. Bigger sunfish consume small forage fish. Bass and walleyes feed on juvenile sunfish.

Anglers often take sunfish using small jigs, tipped with grubs, in early spring. As

waters warm, worms become excellent bait. Half a night crawler is plenty for enticing Oneida Lake’s aggressive sunfish. Ultralight rods and light lines (2 or 4 pound test) make sunfishing a sporting endeavor. Excellent ice fishing for all members of the sunfish family occurs in Big Bay. Grubs and tiny jigs are, again, the tickets to success.

A daily bag limit of 50 sunfish is the only restriction that applies to the species. Give sunfishing a try, if you haven’t already. I guarantee that you won’t be disappointed.

Tony VanDeValk is a research biologist at the Cornell Field Station, Shackleton Point.



Katie VanDeValk (left) and Jamie D'Eredita reflect the pleasures of Oneida Lake sunfishing.

Necrology

Millard Rogers, 1916-2000

The Association notes, with deep regret, the passing of Millard Rogers, one of the best friends Oneida Lake ever had.

Millard was born in Brewerton. His parents, Jack and Ruth Rogers, operated the village's "Red and White" Market. Jack was an Oneida Lake "fish pirate," who, like many Brewerton men, used the lake to help support his family. Millard, and his brother Charles "Chuck" Rogers, grew up on Oneida lake and this affinity, in part, led them to start the Brewerton Bait Shop, that became Brewerton Sports. Their partnership endured for more than 50 years.



Millard was graduated from Central Square High School and Syracuse University, where he majored in physical education. Among his first jobs were positions as Headmaster of the School For The Deaf in White Plains and membership in the faculty of his alma mater, Syracuse. After leaving the university, he and Chuck established the Bait Shop. The Shop became the primary source of bait, tackle, and accurate, reliable angling information for Oneida Lake's west end fishermen.

Civic mindedness graced Millard's character. He was a 60-year member of the Brewerton Fire Department and a 54-year member of the local Masonic Lodge. He served on the Board of Education of the Central Square School District and helped start the Brewerton Chamber of Commerce. Millard was also active in local politics. He chaired the Central New York Regional Planning Board for 20 years, was elected Supervisor for the Town of Cicero, and served on the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors. He even ran for the New York State Assembly.

Millard was a charter member of the Oneida Lake Association. A director for many years, he also served as Association's President. He was a vigilant guardian of the lake's environment. An examination of past issues of the *Bulletin* reveals scores of articles that he wrote, citing his ideas, or describing his accomplishments.

Controversy challenged, but never awed Millard. He led the fight to outlaw the sale of Oneida Lake's walleyed pike. Even though many of his neighbors opposed construction of the Oneida Shores County Park, he vocally supported the facility. He believed that the lake was a public resource and that people deserved as much access to it as possible.

Millard was active in the Fort Brewerton Historical Society. He loved history and his stories about the lake's past highlighted his conversations. His warm, soft-toned style of speaking made people trust him and value his ideas. He lectured about Oneida Lake at gatherings throughout Central New York and was a major source of information for the book *Oneida Lake - Place Names and History*, published in 1989.

A local paper once wrote, "Millard Rogers has given the majority of his life to the betterment of life for all those whom he touches."

To this we might add, "And for the preservation and enhancement of the lake that he loves."

Every person who cares about Oneida Lake can be grateful that he lived there.

Evadene Swanson, 1913-2001

The Association extends its condolences to the family of Evadene Swanson, who passed away earlier this year. Mrs. Swanson, the wife of the late Dr. Gustav A. Swanson, was an accomplished writer, historian, and teacher. Having a background in art history and possessing a doctorate in American history, she served as the curator of Cornell University's art slides' collection and she authored articles and books about local historical topics in the Ithaca and Fort Collins, Colorado, areas. The Swansons moved to the latter city in 1966, when Dr. Swanson resigned his post as Chairman of Cornell's Department of Conservation to accept an appointment as Chairman of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Management at Colorado State University.

Gustav "Gus" Swanson had an enormous impact on Oneida Lake. During his Cornell tenure (1948 - 1966), he convinced the university to set aside "Xandria," Charles Brown's Estate at Shackelton Point, as a biological field station dedicated to research and teaching. Evadene was Dr. Swanson's invaluable partner at Cornell. She was known for her kindness and hospitality, especially with students and their families.

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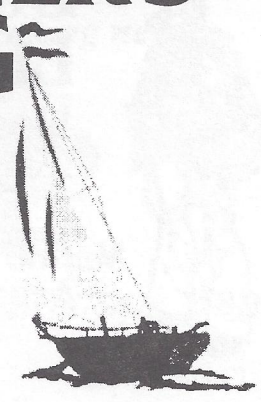
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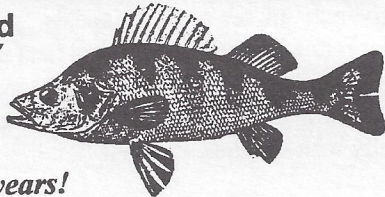
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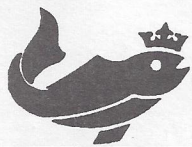
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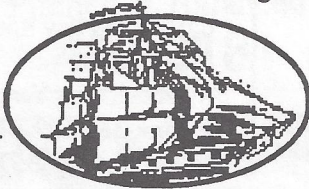
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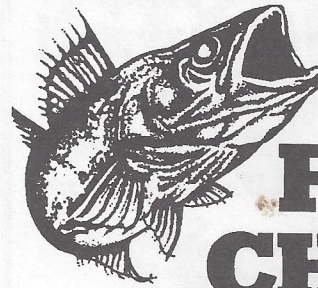
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