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C.A.S.T. anglers converge on marina at Big Cedar Lodge



Mary Borman, 10, of Fayetteville, Ark., along with her parents, Marie and Terry, fish with Tom Bell, of Kimberling City, shown driving the boat into the marina Sunday. submitted photo

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RIDGEDALE — More than two dozen local fishing pros hit Table Rock Lake to see novice anglers reel in the best catches Sunday.

“Catch A Special Thrill” came to Big Cedar Lodge for the first time, getting 24 of the area’s disadvantaged and disabled children out on the lake for a special day of fishing.

It was only 19-year-old Chelsea Durhams’ second time out on the lake, but she fished like a pro and reeled in 10 to 12 fish.

Durham, of Farmington, Ark., said her secret to fishing success didn’t have anything to do with her rod or reel.

"Here fishy, fishy, fishy," she said, explaining how she did it.

Four-year-old Morgan Duffy, of Nixa, petted his fish.

"They were slimy," his 8-year-old brother Hauk said.

According to 7-year-old Scotlyn Belew, of Springfield, who reeled in 15 blue gill and five bass, the fish weren't the only thing slimy on Sunday.

"Disgusting," she said, "I didn't like the worms. They were slimy."

But, Scotlyn did recognize the worms serve a great purpose.

"You can catch fish with them," she said.

Mary Borman, 10, of Fayetteville, Ark., did more than fish.

"I drove the boat the whole way," she said.

Ten-year-old Adam Gasper, of Branson West, gave his fishing trip "300 thumbs up."

"We had an absolute blast," said Gasper's guide, James Rushton, of Kimberling City.

"I thought this would be a great opportunity for them," said Mike Mrosko, a retreat coordinator for Camp Barnabas, one of the event's partners. "They don't get an opportunity to do this."

After all the children and their families were off the lake, the director of C.A.S.T., Jim Owens, thanked the parents for taking the time to take their children fishing.

"If you really want to see what the U.S. is all about, look around this room," Owen said.

This was the first time Catch A Special Thrill, known as C.A.S.T., came to Big Cedar Lodge, and was made possible by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bass Pro Shops, Big Cedar Lodge, Camp Barnabas and Developmental Center of the Ozarks.

After fishing Table Rock Lake, the children and their families were treated to a fish fry.

Since 1991, C.A.S.T. has given special needs children a quality outdoor recreational experience through the sport of fishing. Whether it is because of financial burdens, physical limitations, transportation problems or lack of parental expertise, the children invited to take part in C.A.S.T. events, have very little, if any, access to recreational activities, C.A.S.T. officials reported. By matching them up with experienced fishermen from local bass, walleye, trout and salmon clubs, C.A.S.T. provides the children and their parents the opportunity to learn fishing skills, boating safety and angler ethics.

"These youth live in a routine and it is difficult to remove them from it," said Owens. "It's terrific to be able to help these kids. They're asking questions, spirited, full of life and heart — wanting to live."