

A great day of fishing and fun in Fredericton

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On July 11, members of the Saint John River Chapter of Muskies Canada is teaming up with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fredericton-Oromocto for a day of fishing.
Photo: SUBMITTED

There is only one thing members of the local muskies chapter enjoy more than fishing, and that's sharing the sport with others.

This Saturday, they'll be spending a few hours doing just that with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fredericton-Oromocto.

The plan for July 11, says Jeff Swim, is to head out on the water from the north side green around 10 a.m. and fish until noon, then come back to shore for a barbecue. After lunch, from 1 to 3 p.m., participants will enjoy some more fishing.

Swim is a director at large with the Saint John River Chapter of Muskies Canada and the organizer of Saturday's event, with help from other chapter members.

"We take out a Big Brother Big Sister with their Little Brother or Little Sister for a day of fishing. Whatever we can do to get them in a boat," he says. "Our group has done that for a number of years now. This is my first year planning it."

They do this, he says, as a way to give back to the community.

"A lot of the kids do not get the opportunity to go fishing. I've had a couple young ladies I've raised who are older now and they used to love to go fishing, and still do. It's a great experience for the kids who just don't get that opportunity," says Swim. "We're really lucky, and that's what I told the guys when I was talking about it and asking for boats to volunteer. We're very fortunate, we've got boats, and we take it for granted sometimes. Not everybody has that privilege, so we should share it."

What does he hope the kids get from the experience?

"Just hopefully a really good day out in nature and catch a few fish along the way, and have a lot of fun," he says.

It's a great way to introduce kids to fishing and nature, he says, while teaching them to appreciate both.

"Our organization is based on conservation. We release everything we catch. So I think it teaches conservation and just gives the kids an opportunity to do something I don't think they would get out to do," says Swim.

Rhonda Rogers, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fredericton-Oromocto, says an event like this is absolutely

wonderful for their non-profit organization.

“It means for our children an opportunity they may not have had, plus it helps with the expenses of volunteers doing activities with kids,” she says. “We have a group going and this, I think, is our third year and every year the kids have had a wonderful time doing it.”

Some of the kids have never been out on a boat, while for others this will be their first time fishing, she says.

Though she hasn't gotten out to the fishing events herself, Rogers says this year Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fredericton-Oromocto has a summer student through the SEED program, James Eckstein, who will be going.

“He's taking one of our little boys who doesn't have a Big Brother yet, so one of our little boys who's on the waiting list is going to go out fishing,” she says. “So they're pretty excited about that.”

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fredericton-Oromocto is always looking for new Big Brothers and Big Sisters to join their organization, says Rogers.

“We're always looking for mentors for children and we always have a waiting list for children, who are waiting for that special someone to come into their life,” she says.

Being a Big Brother or Big Sister is a lot of fun, she says.

“The person gives three to four hours a week to a child for at least a year, that's the up front commitment,” she says. “Many matches go on much longer than that.”

Rogers says the volunteer goes to the child's home and picks them up, then takes them out to enjoy different activities.

“They can do things like go to a movie, go fishing, go for a walk, biking. Everyday activities like that. We encourage volunteers to do things with the children, but in the end what's most important is the relationship that develops,” she says. “Through that relationship, children usually gain confidence and self-esteem, and that makes a huge difference for them.”

It isn't just the child who benefits from the pairing, either.

“Our volunteers who are involved with the program get a great sense of reward and fun. A lot of people will say they get to go out and do those things they wouldn't take the time to do,” says Rogers. “And they get a really special relationship in their life. It's a

really fun way to help out a young person in our community.”

There is a waiting list, she says, especially for boys who are waiting for a Big Brother.

“Some of our boys can wait a couple of years, so that can be long and discouraging,” she says. “That’s why programs like the ones James is working for this summer are really important. We like to keep the kids engaged while they wait for that special one–on–one relationship.”

Saturday’s event will definitely keep participants engaged, as the members of the Saint John River Chapter of Muskies Canada are pretty passionate about fishing.

Swim says he loves almost everything about the sport.

“It’s very challenging. They’re very huge and you can fish for days before you get one. In fact, I caught one (Monday) and my wife was with me. I’ve been fishing for two years and it’s the first time she’s ever been in the boat with me when I caught one. Her joke is there’s no fish in the river,” he says, laughing. “A lot of it’s the challenge, and to catch them is rewarding, too. You have to let them go and they go back. It’s a very nice sport fish.”

As for the chapter, he says, “we’re a really nice bunch of guys that just enjoy getting out fishing and enjoying each other’s company. And we base everything on conservation. We believe in hook and release 100 per cent, so the sport is there for future generations.”

To learn more, visit www.muskiesnb.ca.

The chapter is always looking for new members, says Swim, new people that want to get out and enjoy the sport.

“I only joined last year and they’re such a nice bunch of guys, they’re great people to be around. Very oriented to sport and good sportsmen, everyone is very honest.”

To learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fredericton-Oromocto, call 458-8941.

“We’re always happy to meet with people,” says Rogers. “What it means is it’s great for us, but one of the children on our waiting list will receive that great benefit hopefully as a result of someone contacting us.”