

A retiree's final gesture

Fishing Derby succeeds through late chief's generosity and perseverance



Photos by Nova Lamela-Johnson

Above, kids and adults are seen May 3 at the Duck Pond at Travis Air Force Base during the annual Fishing Derby. At right, event sponsors hand out fishing poles.



By Senior Airman Shaun Emery
60TH AIR MOBILITY WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Travis Air Force Base held its annual fishing derby May 3 here. More than 300 anglers from Team Travis came out the base's Duck Pond to try their hand at catching the big one.

But the real story behind the event was the sacrifice made by a man whose main purpose was to help children while staring down his own mortality.

Retired Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Larry Johns ran a nonprofit organization called Kids Day of Fishing that gives special-needs children the opportunity to try their hands at fishing. It was during a dinner for children with special needs that Brian Floyd, 60th Services Squadron deputy director, met Chief Johns. When Chief Johns was told about this year's event, he expressed his interest in helping with the derby.

"When I told him that we would be interested in working with his organization, he immediately volunteered to supply all of the fish, a large group of volunteers and made a promise that the first 250 children that signed up would receive a brand new fishing pole," said Mr. Floyd.

A week before the derby, a truck with two large tanks carrying bass and catfish backed up to the Duck Pond and sent more than 1,200 pounds of fish hurling into the water. As this year's participants hauled their catch out of the water, few realized the great lengths Chief Johns went to make the day special.

"In the months following our initial introduction, my staff and I met with Chief Johns two or three times a month," Mr. Floyd said. "What I didn't know at the time was that Chief Johns was battling a very advanced case of colon cancer. On each occasion he had gone through his chemotherapy treatments the day before we



Photo courtesy Michael Johns

Retired Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Larry Johns

met. In all the times that I met with Larry to work out the details, he never once mentioned his cancer to me or my staff."

Sadly, Chief Johns passed away May 3, succumbing to the cancer he was battling, but not before his gift of a successful fishing derby for Team Travis came to fruition.

"My Dad's entire life was devoted to the military," said Michael Johns, Chief Johns' son and residing president of Kids

Day of Fishing. "He felt that Travis is the biggest part of Fairfield and he wanted to treat the children to a great day."

The 60th Services Squadron presented a plaque to the family of Chief Johns, who was able to see it prior to his passing. Additionally, the partnership with Kids Day of Fishing is going to be an annual event.

"These events are all about the kids," said Michael Johns. "That's the way my father wanted it."



Kids and parents enjoy the sun May 3 during the Fishing Derby at the Duck Pond at Travis Air Force Base. More than 300 anglers turned out for the annual event.