



Mike Greener/Daily Republic file (2009)

Nahdarrien McGee holds up the first fish he has ever caught during the 2009 Kids Fishing Derby at the Dover Park Pond.

By AMY MAGINNIS-HONEY
DAILY REPUBLIC

Mike Johns chokes back tears as he talks about "his kids."

Though Johns has no children of his own, he has a heart for them, especially those with special needs. His brother, Lee Johns, has cerebral palsy.

"They said he wouldn't be able to do anything," Johns said. "Now, he works in systems integration with Sprint."

Four years ago, with encouragement from his father, Johns started Kids Day of Fishing, Inc., which offers local youth a chance to experience the fun of fishing.

And, at the same time, get the youngsters outside.

Among Johns' "kids" is Ryan Gunzelman, 14, who has spina bifida and spends his waking hours in a wheelchair.

"He has some get up and go," Johns said of the Suisun City teen. "He's got a great attitude. He doesn't complain. He never quits. He's a great role model."

"I think it's a terrific opportunity for Ryan to get outdoors," said Jon Pollock, Ryan's dad.

Like many in his age group, Ryan enjoys video games and his laptop, his father said.

"One of the benefits from fishing is that it gets him outdoors," Pollock said. "He's always liked exercise, so it's a natural thing for him to be drawn to fishing."

"It's a really good experience," Ryan said of Kids Day of Fishing events. "It makes you feel like you've accomplished something. It's a great way to spend some time and meet people."

Last year Pollock and Ryan took advantage of the first overnight camping-fishing event sponsored by Kids Day of Fishing.

Johns was a little younger than Ryan when he started fishing. At the time, the Johns family was stationed in Alaska. It was there, when

MORE THAN CATCHING A FISH

Local man shares his love of sport with children

by April 24 at the Fairfield Civic Center pond. The event is geared for 200 kids, ages 3-15 and special needs children of all ages.

Special needs children can register via the Web site, <http://www.kidsdayoffishing.org>. Other youth will register at 8 a.m. at the event.

All participants must have a completed medical release form, which is also on the Web site.

Those attending will get T-shirts, rods, reels, tackle kits and bait. Trophies and prizes will be awarded.

More than 600 pounds of catfish and bass will be put in the civic center pond. Johns said he hopes the public will allow the

derby to end before those not taking part in the derby casts their lines.

California Fish and Game regulations are in place, meaning the pond must be emptied of all fish, no fish can be taken alive and everyone over 16 must have a fishing license.

Other Kids Day of Fishing, Inc. events include the fourth annual Kids Day of Fishing at Lake Solano Park on June 19 and the second annual Kids Camp at Lake Solano Park on July 24-25.

The nonprofit also has a fishing event on Travis Air Force Base for children of servicemen and women deployed, and another on the San Francisco Bay.

Information on these are also on the Web site.

Johns said he hopes the woman who handed him the initial \$20 to launch Kids Day of Fishing, Inc. knows how much the program means to him and the children.

Johns had been in the Longs Drug Store -- now CVS -- on Travis Boulevard discussing the program with a store employee in the sporting goods area. After he left the store and got in his car, a woman approached and motioned for him to roll his window down.

She'd heard some of the conversation in the store and asked to be part of the program, handing him \$20.

Kids Day of Fishing, Inc. hosts about 700 youth a year, Johns said.



Brad Zweerink/Daily Republic file (2008)

Mikes Johns, center, with his brother Lee Johns, and their mom, Anni. Mike co-founded Kids Day of Fishing, Inc. four years ago.

he was about 12, that Johns got his first rod and reel.

That was just the beginning of what has become a passion for Johns.

Kids Day of Fishing has expanded to four major projects that will total about \$25,000. Johns foots much of the bill himself. Donations, sponsors and membership in Kids Day of Fishing help round out money sources.

Kids Day of Fishing will host a fishing der-

At a glance

Who: Kids Day of Fishing, Inc. **What:** Fairfield Fishing Derby

When: 8 a.m. April 24 **Where:** Fairfield Civic Center Pond **Cost:** Free

Info: <http://www.kidsdayoffishing.org>; 425-9792, 816-2037

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