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Gavin Pyle, right, and Jonathan Gray, left, watch as a bass is pulled out of a pond at Lake Solano Park on Saturday during the Kids Day of Fishing.

# Kids get a kick out of Day of Fishing on Lake Solano

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FAIRFIELD — Chris Stratton couldn't wait to get the day started Saturday. The 12-year-old rose before 6 a.m., waking his family inside their tent alongside the water.

"I can't get him up early for school, but come to one of these . . ." said his mother, Sue-Finn Stratton of Vacaville.

Chris Stratton has cerebral palsy and was one of about 40 youths taking part in Kids Day of Fishing, an annual event put on by the Fairfield nonprofit of the same name.

Saturday was full of crafts, barbecue and lessons about fish. The children gathered around a kiddie pool filled with bass, catfish and two sturgeons.

Their eyes lit up as volunteer Megan Harms explained sturgeons can live to be 100 years old, grow to 20-feet long and are among the oldest species on Earth.

"This is a dinosaur fish, ladies and gentlemen," Harms said.

Mike Johns, who founded the nonprofit, plucked one out of the pool to show the kids its vacuum-like mouth. He walked it around the pool to allow each kid to pet it.

"It's head is hard," one kid said. "It's so cold," said another. Some reached into the pool themselves and picked up the bass. The catfish were harder to grab.

Eight-year-old Douglas

Johnson, of Vacaville, later described the fish as "yucky."

The event is officially in its fourth year. Johns, who runs Mail Mart Plus in Fairfield, started the nonprofit as a way to expose disadvantaged and special needs children to the great outdoors.

For some of the families, including Ana Garcia, it marks their first camping experience. Garcia, who lives in Fairfield, brought her three boys: Jose, 7; Anthony, 6; and Ruben, 4. She called it a bonding experience.

"I was actually entertained myself," she said of the arts and crafts workshop in which she carved a soapstone of a bear.

Johns' passion for giving back to families with special needs kids comes from his own household. His older brother, Lee, has cerebral palsy. Johns said Lee may not be able to move freely but his mind is sharp. Lee is a systems programmer for SprintNextel Corporation.

Johns called Chris Stratton his success story. Chris has attended many of Johns' events and even goes on his boat on the bay with his wheelchair.

Chris Stratton plans on fishing with the rest of the camp today. Johns has stocked a fishing pond with more than 200 pounds of fish.

Chris caught five last time with a little help from his dad.

"I hook 'em and I let him reel them in," Rick Stratton said.