Reeling Them In: 240 Local Youths Got "Hooked on Fishing" Friday

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On Friday, July 21, Point Lookout State Park’s fishing pier was rather crowded; among those holding the rods…over 240 local youths! It was the annual “Hooked on Fishing Event,” co-sponsored this year by the Southern Maryland Chapter of the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen’s Association (SMC-MSSA), St. Mary’s County Department of Recreation and Parks, and Point Lookout State Park.

Marcia Thomas, 7, pulls up a fish

The annual event has been held every July since the early ’90s. Originally the SMC-MSSA invited children involved in free summer camps for extra assistance with reading and academics, but over the years the numbers in those camps has dwindled (along with the grant money that supported them). Last year the kids fishing was held at St. Mary’s Lake and involved two summer reading camps, totaling about 65 youths. “It was a far cry from what we knew the event could be,” said McGuire, who has chaired the event since 2001. “And we wanted to connect the kids with the Bay rather than a salt lake,” he added.

This year the association asked St. Mary’s County Department of Recreation and Parks to open the event to all of those enrolled in summer camps in the county. “We have 500 rods and reels and we’re just waiting for an opportunity to put them to good use,” Scott McGuire of SMC-MSSA told The Bay Net on Friday, when half of their stock of equipment was out on the pier.

“It’s part of our association’s mission to help connect kids with resource,” McGuire said. “There are lots of kids who live near the water but don’t use it. We’re a large part of the watershed for the Chesapeake Bay, but – believe it or not – many of them have never even seen the Chesapeake,” McGuire told The Bay Net.

Lisa Misa, 6, Kristin Edmondson, 6, and Anna-Marie Doran, 7 1/2

On Friday the kids were having a blast fishing from the pier at Point Lookout. They came from two educational camps, three “Fab Fun” recreational camps of 6 to 10 year olds, and a teen camp of 11 to 13s. For some it was their first experience with a fishing rod, and most of them managed to catch more than one during their three hours by the Bay.

“We come early in the morning and put down chum bags, so we kind of stack the deck a little,” McGuire confided.

“I didn’t know how to fish,” said Anna-Marie Doran, aged 7, who lamented that so far she had only hooked a jellyfish. “She had to teach me,” she said of her fishing friend Kristin Edmondson, 6. “I told you, when it bends you got a fish!” Kristin chimed in. “We always have fun on our field trips,” their counselor, Miss Michelle, told The Bay Net.

In all over a hundred fish were caught and released by the group on Friday morning. They included Spot, Bluefish, Sea-Robin, and Cow-Nosed Rays.

“It was an awesome morning and tremendously rewarding. There were smiles all around. I’m sure everyone can’t wait for next year!” McGuire said.

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