

# Wishing, Fishing, Making Memories

by Terry Placzek, Event Coordinator

Since September of 2000, United Special Sportsman Alliance (USSA) and it's major division, Childwish, have granted thousands of wishes for disabled and critically ill children and disabled veterans throughout the country. The 100% volunteer organization provides hunting and fishing events free of charge to these children and their families.

Among these outings is a Lake Michigan salmon and trout fishing event held annually in the beautiful harbor city of Port Washington, Wisconsin. The event is held on the Friday and Saturday of Father's Day weekend each summer. The families are from Wisconsin and surrounding states. They arrive Friday afternoon and after checking in at the motel, come to the marina area for a "Meet and Greet" picnic hosted by the local Kiwanis or the Port Washington Yacht Club.

Here they will meet their captains, receive t-shirts for all family members as well as a trophy and special gifts for each of the children. While enjoying their dinner, families and captains discuss and plan the next morning's fishing and set a time to meet at the harbor. After dinner, those captains whose boats are moored in the harbor take the families to check out the craft they will board to

begin their Great Lakes fishing adventure.

Saturday, before the sun peeks above the water in the east, twenty-five boats filled with smiling children and their families head out of the harbor. The excitement and anticipation of battling that first salmon or trout is palpable. Captains guide their crafts and their special guests to the area they have chosen to troll. For the next five or six hours, provided the fish are cooperative, the kids will get the thrill of reeling in their first Lake Michigan salmon or trout. Often unmistakable "squeals" of success can be heard emanating from boats filled with excited yellow-shirted children! Around 11:00 a.m. all boats return to the harbor to show off their catch, take photos, and get their catch cleaned.

Once the cleaning and packing of fish is completed, it is time for another picnic hosted by the Port Washington Lions Club. While enjoying lunch excited kids can be heard reliving every strike, every "battle" and every fish landed! After lunch, it is time to bid farewell to newfound friends. Most families from Wisconsin will head home while those from neighboring states are provided one more night at the motel.

It is always difficult to decide who has the bigger smiles: the kids, their families, or the boat captains and other

volunteers. While the children and their families are the recipients of a fishing trip they might otherwise never have an opportunity to experience, the captains and other volunteers often share that they feel they gain far more. The chance to share their equipment, knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, themselves is "repaid" many times over with the excitement and, yes, the love these children offer so freely. The bonds created in this short time together are obvious and quite touching. Often the friendships created during this event extend well beyond the weekend in the form of letters, social media contacts and even holiday greeting cards.

Obviously this is a significant undertaking requiring numerous volunteers and donors. The majority of the twenty-five boats that host the families are privately owned and operated by members of the Great Lake Sports Fishermen, Ozaukee County. As mentioned, the picnics are hosted by local clubs and fraternal organizations. The event is also sponsored by Safari Club International (SCI), Great Lakes Sport Fishermen Ozaukee County, other organizations and private individuals.

For additional information or to apply for this or other United Special Sportsman Alliance events, please visit the USSA website at [www.childwish.org](http://www.childwish.org).



