

A Reflection On A Great Guide Year
By Steve Welch

I have been a part time fishing guide for eighteen years and in 2010 I decided to make it my full time profession. This being my third year of full time guiding I am pleased to say the business is thriving even through these hard times we have all faced these past few years. I have done personally 671 guide trips since going full time or an average of 223 a year. In Illinois that isn't bad. I now have a second boat and even a third when we really get busy so we can take care of just about any of your needs.

My season starts just after my last show in early March and it is not uncommon for me to guide seven days a week for the first five and a half months. August is my downfall and I can't seem to get it booked the entire month. Even though I still do about twenty to twenty-five days. With school going back and the summer coming to an end it is just always slow. I usually wrap up my season around Christmas leaving only January and February that I don't wet a line every day. Believe me I still get in some fishing during those two winter months. It is just not in Illinois.

I learned a long time ago on Shelbyville you need to be a pan fish guide if you want to stay busy. Most folks that would hire a guide are inexperienced fishermen and just want constant action and something good to eat when they get home. I bet each year I get less than ten phone calls from someone wanting to bass fish or muskie fish. Several have tried to make a guide service a go fishing for these species only and all have failed. If you want to be a full time guide on Shelbyville not only do you have to be a good crappie fisherman but you also must be a good white bass fisherman and you must be able to catch fish June, July, August, and September not just spring and fall when it is easy.

Being a guide isn't always about putting a ton of fish in the boat either. I have trips that all we do is educate anglers on how to fish patterns on this massive lake or how to understand today's hi-tech electronics. Setting the nose of the boat on a brush pile and clients watching the guide haul them in one after another won't get many call backs either. I never try and get ahead of my clients. I want them to understand how I caught each fish and show him or her the subtle things I am doing versus what they are doing. When we are vertical jig fishing for crappie I devised a special seating system that allows me to watch both my clients and make sure that they are fishing in the brush. I even use a shorter rod so all three of us are equally in the same brush all the time. Since they set two-feet behind me.

I pride myself in being able to bounce back and forth between crappie and white bass most of the season and we routinely get our three person limit of crappie then go get a hundred white bass to ensure they get the biggest stringer they have ever had. If you blow them away they will be back and so will all their friends. Word of mouth is a guide's best friend.

Blowing them away with fish isn't the only way either. I have my twenty-one foot Ranger bass boat loaded with today's hi-tech electronics. I have not only the biggest guide boat on the lake but I also have the best electronic setup. I have two Lowrance HDS 10's one on bow and one at console. Both have side imaging and down scan and these units will really save a guide trip. I really count on them in summer with side imaging to find schools of both crappie and white bass. I also have a Lowrance HDS 7 and a Lowrance HDS that I use for mapping and 2-d sonar. Each unit is networked so if I add or delete a waypoint it is done on all four units at once.

I use my mapping cards to locate river channels and then side scan the drop offs looking for brush if I am crappie fishing and of course baitfish. When I find some brush I can easily see any crappie hiding in its branches. I can then stop the screen on my Lowrance and run my curser over to where I saw the brush and fish and mark it with a waypoint then just go right to it. I know \$8,000 in electronics is overkill but it is my lively hood and if I want to stay the busiest guide on the lake I need to have the best toys.

I will be doing outdoor fishing shows these next three months, promoting my guide service and educating anglers on how to use Lowrance HDS systems and catch fish on Shelbyville and Kentucky Lake my vacation spot and winter fishing hole. My partner and I have a very informative power point presentation jam packed with knowledge and very cool screen shots taken from our Lowrance HDS systems. I go through an entire calendar year and explain how to catch crappie, white bass and walleye on Shelbyville.

My first show is the Let's Go Fishing Show in Collinsville January 4-6, Then I go to Bloomington to the Illinois Fish & Feather Expo January 25-27, Then up to Tinley Park Fishing & Outdoor Show Feb. 9-10 and then back home to the Central Illinois Outdoor Expo in Arthur on Feb. 22-23 and lastly to the Elmwood All Outdoors Show, March 2-3.

I decided to put in several happy clients' pictures from 2012. I must of cleaned 15,000 fish this past year so I know I had a bunch of happy clients. Feel free to browse through my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com and see a bunch of fish catches in 2012. Stop in and see me at the fishing shows and share all of your stories.