

## **A Fishing Guide's Life Can Be a Grind**

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I usually start guiding every weekend the first of April and miss very few weekends until Christmas. That means for me that all the little things that need done around the house mostly fall on my wife. She is my rock and never complains. But for me it is a grind. People complain if they go three weeks without a day off, try eight months. I work as a plumbing and HVAC service technician from Tuesday through Friday ten-hour shifts then guide on Saturday, Sunday and Monday sixteen-hour shifts. This leaves little time to do anything else. Little things like just getting maintenance done on your truck can be a real problem. This year the wife had to follow me to the ramp and then take my trailer to the repair shop and have tires and wheel bearings put on. Never complained once. She knew the money lost on the guide trip far outweighed the inconvenience of getting up early on her day off.

I get people e-mailing me all the time wanting to know just what it takes to get started in the guide business. First to work on a government lake you need personal liability on your business not just boat insurance. This will run you five to six hundred dollars a year. Then you need a Passenger for Hire license from the state and that will run you fifty dollars. Out six hundred and fifty bucks before you even start. Then you need to have your boat inspected by a Game Warden to sign off on the Passenger for Hire license. All these need to be on record at the Corp of Engineer office.

I have a very extensive website and I have a web builder that runs it for me and that is over a hundred a month. Money well spent as most of my work comes from my website. I also travel all over the state in the winter and set in a booth and give seminars to reach new clients. More money spent before the season starts.

I write columns for two magazines and teach people how to fish and this takes more time and after all these years it's difficult to keep it fresh. I do radio interviews and newspaper interviews and this year I have taken on a new role and that is filming informative DVD's.

From the middle of March until Christmas this runs your life and everyone that is close to you. Then with the winter fishing shows and speaking engagements there isn't really a break in the winter.

I tell people that want this life remember when you look out the window and it is pouring down rain snowing, sleeting, wind so hard it has the trees laying over. There is a fishing guide out there trying to make a buck. I do however get to enjoy the spring more than most of you and by mid April I already have my summer tan.

The wildlife I get to see by being out there all the time. I have seen a herd of deer cross the lake right beside me. I have seen trophy bucks, turkeys, eagles, pelicans, loons. After a while it just becomes routine.

This summer I heard a loud roaring sound only to look right over my head not twenty feet from me and a hot air balloon was lowering itself down to talk to me. There were six of them and one by one they lowered down said hello and then hit the gas and rose back up into the clouds.

This season starts my fifteenth year and I don't see me quitting anytime soon. You just have to have a passion for it and after a while it just becomes the new faces you meet and the experiences you can give them. All the time I get clients coming up to me and saying I gave them the best fishing trip they have ever had. Some tell me that they caught more fish in one day with me than they have caught their entire life collectively. The look on a small child's face on that first big fish is priceless. This summer a kid looked at his father after he just caught his first of many buffalo over twenty pounds and said Steve puts a whole new meaning to the word big fish. They had only fished small farm ponds and to them a two-pound bass was huge.

Of course time on the water keeps your skills honed and this helps me in tourneys. This past year I fished

the Crappie master's Shelbyville qualifier and won it. Then the Crappie U.S.A. qualifier on Shelbyville on the semi-pro side and won it as well. Both these tourneys bring in the top teams in the country and I qualified for both their respective classics.

One-thing longevity gets you are repeat clients. Since I don't guide full time and twelve guide trips a month doesn't take long to fill especially in the spring. I would give me a buzz early if you want a guided trip. With last year's floods and high water the following year is always the best fishing we have for some time. The fish are fat and healthy and this year's crop should be a good one. Early season starts as soon as you will be reading this article.