

Show Season Makes or Breaks My Season

By Steve Welch

Technology has changed in my 22 years of being a fishing guide. Better ways to reach your public and I have embraced it. Two websites, one a fishing forum called Illinois Fish Talk with nearly 1500 members and twenty times that in visitors annually. A website called www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com that gets over 40,000 visitors annually. I have two Facebook Pages with tons of visitors and I write a monthly column for two instate magazines and have for nearly 22 years. I have done interviews for columns in Field and Stream, In-Fisherman, Walleye In-sider, Illinois Game and Fish and several others. Many radio interviews including several on ESPN radio. Guest spots on several fishing shows as well. This is just the price of doing business. I would rather just go fishing every day and have customers fall into my lap.

All of these methods of reaching my clients still does not add up to all the guide trips I get from doing the winter Outdoor Fishing and Hunting Shows. Not only do you get to see most of the clients you took out over the last couple of years or in my case last 22 years. But they hang around the booth and do all my sales for me on booking new customers. I have tons of pictures from previous guide trips and I give seminars at all these shows and now do them in power point so I can put even more customer pictures in them. When I complete my last show in early March I am booked solid seven days a week until end of July and by July it will be end of September. I am usually booked two months out is what I tell my want to be clients so book early. Right now on January 11th as I am writing this I have 82 trips booked thus far for 2016. This is more than a lot of guides I know do all year. So if you are looking to be a guide you need to be doing outdoor shows period. With all the other avenues out there over half my trips come from doing just four to five fishing shows.

In 2015 I did 204 eight hour guide trips or one a day and feel free to look at my books if you don't think so. Got nothing to hide because we claim every one of them on taxes. Each year I am up a little or down a little from the 200 mark. With the weather in Illinois 204 trips are about all one can do. This makes me the busiest fishing guide in the state and it takes all the avenues and hard work to obtain this status. My good buddy Kyle Schoenherr is crawling up on me and if it wasn't for all the tourneys he fishes he would probably pass me especially since he can guide more in the winter months. Plus he has a heated garage and is several years younger than me. Not to mention the reigning Crappiemasters and Crappie U.S.A. classic champ. Once December hits I am worn out so he can have it. Also it is good thing he is not on my home lake and I never have to compete against him.

I am lucky to guide on Lake Shelbyville. It is the crown jewel of all the Army Corp lakes nation-wide. It is the prettiest, clearest and deepest. We have all the best campgrounds, ramps, docks and cleaning stations and get over a million visitors each year. It is a big houseboat lake and has over three hundred moored in the three marinas. Some are over a hundred feet long. Very popular camping destination and has seven public and several private campgrounds and each hundreds of campers.

It has the best walleye/sauger fishing of anywhere in the state and the crappie can be caught all year long. It has an abundance of white bass as well as the state record muskie.

The crappie can be caught all year long but it is the three hot summer months that set it apart. I cannot think of another lake in the state that in July, August and September you can catch over a hundred crappie every day and set in a nice southwest breeze so you never know it is ninety degrees out.

Once the shad have their first spawn in about early to mid-May the walleye position themselves on the vast flats that have isolated stumps scattered throughout. This is when my walleye boat really shines over the other guides that use bass boats to guide from. We pull bottom bouncers and spinner rigs and cover water on ledges keying in on stumps. I guide from a 20ft. tiller boat that is wide open to allow several of us to pull these spinners. Plus you are down in the boat so you don't feel like you are going to fall out. We catch a ton of post spawn crappie pulling these spinners which makes these trips the hardest to get. As of this writing all of them are gone and I don't do them until late May and June.

The summer slip-bobber minnow trips are my second most popular. Catching tons of fish and nice weather. These trips bring out mom and dad and the kids or just a husband and wife team. I have done a ton of them and always make the female comfortable by assuring her that a bathroom is always near by since our lake has 18 boat ramps.

This is another time for the boat to shine. I have a Yar-Craft 2095BTX tiller boat that sets my clients right in front of each other down the side of the boat. This allows me to put the boat beside a deep brush pile and you and your partner just cast over to the brush with an on-board air system between you to hold all the minnows you can use. In this boat you get in set down and never have to move again and you are in comfort down in the boat. Not on top of a casting deck like you are in a bass boat. I switched up two years ago to a lot better guide boat. Go fast bass boats still work better for tourneys whereas only two anglers are in them. But my big tiller is way better to fish three or even four of us in comfort all day. It also has seating for three up on the front deck to allow us to jig for crappie, another big plus.

You can still get in on this years guide trips if you don't wait. I put all my open dates for the year on the front page of my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com and you either call me from there or send me an e-mail. My phone number is 217-762-7257 home and 217-840-1221 cell.