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Maciulis: Nothing like Pfeiffer's muskie yarns

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I admit I have been AWOL for some time now. I appreciate the many emails and calls asking if everything is OK.

It hasn't been.

I was stacking wood July 3 and hurt my back and it's been an interesting odyssey getting home again.

Among the queries was an annual "Hope you're well and Merry Christmas!" phone call from Don Pfeiffer.

Pfeiffer designed quite a few muskie products over the years, including what probably was one of the first "creature hooks" that had a lead belly built in so the lizard would ride upright, naturally, just above the bottom.

Once the host for Fond du Lac's longest-running outdoor radio show, Pfeiffer is a natural and often starts spinning a yarn the minute you settle into his barber's chair in downtown Eagle River.

"Say, Bob, what happened on the High Falls/Caldron Flowage, in northeastern Wisconsin, quite a while back, was certainly bizarre. Yet, how often have you seen it yourself and not realized what had taken place?"

"They were sitting off a point, throwing bucktails," Pfeiffer said, "when a duck just exploded from the shallows and the one guy said to his partner, 'Betcha there's a muskie working the weeds in there.' Now, how many times have we all said that, every time a duck takes off from the water? Anyway, they threw the bucktail and it barely hit the water when the fish just pounced on it.

"They got it in the boat after a wild struggle and, just as they laid it down to measure it, a grebe dropped out of its mouth!

"That fish had just eaten that duck, then hit the bucktail without any hesitation.

"Possession of grebes is illegal, in Wisconsin, so they had to call the DNR and get a special permit because he is going to mount the fish along with the bird, just the way they got it."

The fish measured 53 1/2 inches.

Pfeiff laughed, "I guess we're fishing the wrong lakes, eh?"

And, doing the wrong things, I asked? Like chopping wood.

I got both blades sharpened for the chain saw. As soon as we get a hard freeze, I plan on cutting enough wood to stoke every fireplace in the township.

Then, I can sit by the fire, tie flies or read, and help Sue cook all while basking in the soft glow and warmth of a fire.

Shabbona weekend

Denny Sands has been outstanding in promoting one of Illinois' premier fisheries at Shabbona Lake. For the moment, with muskies stealing the thunder throughout Illinois, with huge fish being reported on the Fox Chain, throughout the Fox River and on the 318-acre Shabbona, Sands announced that the annual "Going For The Muskie Record" hunt for the next Illinois state record will be held the weekend of April 13 to 15.

Shabbona Lake produced four consecutive Illinois state record muskies and DNR surveys confirm the next record might come from the only lake in the state that was designed and built expressly for fishing.

When Shabbona opened during the late 1970s, about the only thing DeKalb County was known for was corn, beans and huge whitetails.

Within a few years, the reservoir was heralded as a tourism boon for the county and soon the beautiful park which surrounds the lake and the stories of remarkable bass, walleye and muskie fishing attracted national attention.

Shabbona Lake and the park are a testament to the incredible management success that is possible when the private sector joins hands with the DNR professionals to create not only first-rate fishing opportunities but an excellent archery deer haven that is among the best-kept secrets in the state.

"We are excited about this event, as we try to bring the Illinois State Muskie record back to Shabbona Lake," Sands said. "Shabbona Lake has four State of Illinois records in its muskie legacy. There is no other lake in Illinois that has had more than one state record. Shabbona Lake's current lake record of 37 pounds, 13 ounces is a mere 11 ounces short of the current state record of 38 pounds, 8 ounces."

Sands explained that there will be only one prize awarded for the first verified new state record muskie, a new 9.9-HP, 4-stroke electric-start long shaft Yamaha outboard engine valued at \$2,800.

The event is open to the public and there is no entry fee.

For more information, visit www.shabbonalake.com or call Lakeside at (815) 824-2581.

The bait and concession are open for the ice fishing season. Ask for Clint or Denny Sands.

Hope you had a wonderful holiday and here's a tip of the cap to what hopefully will be an exciting, delightful year of enjoying the outdoors.

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