

Captain Steve Jones: Reeling in success

By Haley Reid
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“We’ve had scary experiences. We’ve had tornados go right over our heads and touch down on the other side of us while we were out on the water. Sometimes we can’t control what happens out there.”

Unpredictability has been a theme throughout distinguished alumnus Steve Jones’ life. After leaving North with the graduating class of 1970, he faced the impracticality of his childhood dream, ruling out fishing as a career.

Jones deals with change on a daily basis as a local fishing tour guide, providing his charter boat and knowledge to the community.

“I’ve always had a love for fishing, but I never thought it would become a career. Never in a million years when I was younger, but I loved it enough,” Jones said. “I had the gear and the tackle, and every chance I got, I would always go fishing, especially for muskies.”

Jones’ mother, Joyce Cook, has seen this passion from a young age.

“I used to sit down at the park while he sat on the edge by the water, before he ever had a boat, and watch him fish. He loved it from the time he was born,” Cook said.

The far-fetched dream diminished when Jones was hired as the manager at several Burger King establishments in the area. Co-ownership of a pizza parlor with his father also took up much of his time. Both jobs payed the bills but didn’t enthrall him the way casting a line did.

“I kind of got frustrated in not knowing what to do and knowing that I couldn’t really do what I wanted to do,” Jones said.

In his early 20s, after toying with the idea of starting a fishing business, Jones equipped himself with a charter license, allowing him to take paying customers out on the waters, preferably Lake St. Clair.

“While I was in between jobs, I left a stack of cards in a local tackle shop, Lakeside Sporting Goods, and I was amazed at the calls I was getting, and I just met some of the right people that helped get me started,” Jones said. “I wanted to meet people that had a lot of knowledge, that were reputable in the field as well, so I could pick their brains and kind of see what they do. I would start giving seminars at local boat shows, and I

would meet other people that were nationally known — people to look up to.”

With a new start and a demanding business, Jones began to sculpt his hobby into a way to provide a charitable service to the community. Opportunities presented themselves, including Joann’s Derby, an annual fishing event that gave handicapped children a day of activities.

“Joann was a handicapped kid about 12 years old in a wheelchair, and she was a daughter of a good friend,” Jones said. “I would donate my boat and services, and we would take handicapped kids out fishing.”

In addition to the derby, Jones played a part in auctioning off fishing trips to doctors at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing to help raise money for a new cancer wing.

“Michigan Outdoors, to help sell it for maximum dollar, pledged that if you buy the fishing trip and the money goes to a good cause, not only will you go on the trip, but you will be filmed on TV,” Jones said.

Jones is more-than-familiar with being in front of the camera. With three television guest appearances under his belt, he was asked to co-host Fishing Michigan and stuck with the program for two years.

“It didn’t pay, but it was great for reputation and fun to do,” Jones said. “From there, as you get to be known, it kind of snowballs.”

Since the additional publicity, the booming charter keeps the fisherman fully employed with no further need for the fast food industry.

“I’ve always wanted to do something outdoors or at least not be tied up in a building or surrounded by four walls,” Jones said.

Jones said he is rarely found indoors and, although he spends each work day chartering, it never becomes a routine drag as his past jobs had proven.

“I’m not doing the same thing on the computer all day. A lot of things can happen out there,” Jones said. “You can go out fishing one day, and it’s terrible, and the next day you can be killing it. You never know what to expect when you go out, so every day that I work is unscripted.”

The fisherman hopes to see plenty more unpredictable days out on Lake St. Clair.

“It’s what I’ll continue to do until you have to carry me on the boat or something,” Jones said. “Right now, I’m healthy, and I plan on going for a few years still.”



STEVE JONES