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## Reel' fun on the Avon

By LAURA CUDWORTH, STAFF REPORTER

Updated 7 months ago



Eight-year-old Matthew Krijner waits patiently for a bite during the Optimist Club of Stratford s annual fishing derby Saturday. LAURA CUDWORTH/The Beacon Herald

The annual Optimist Club of Stratford trout fishing derby reeled them in hook, line and sinker Saturday.

The shores of the Avon River were lined with fishers hoping to catch the big one -- or in some cases anything other than a sibling or a tree.

Ed Francis got his grandkids, Connor, 11, and Julia Cairns, 9, up "at the crack of dawn" to get down to the river. It was their second year participating and Julia managed to catch her lunch.

"We'll cook them up," Mr. Francis said hinting he was optimistic there would be more.

By the time Julia hooked hers, Connor was still waiting but he wasn't discouraged. He's just a fan of the event in general.

"I like the taste of fish and it's just a nice time to hang out with my papa," he said.

"Hopefully they'll remember this and go fish with their grandkids," Mr. Francis said.

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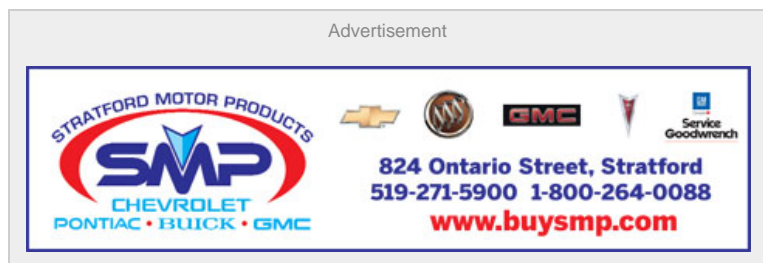
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Not more than a rod length away the Keen family was celebrating because they "finally broke the curse," said David Keen.

Blake Keen, 11, managed to catch the first fish for the family in the six years they had been participating in the derby.

"My grandpa fished and he taught me how," Blake said. "The rod started flopping around on the ground and I picked it up and got my first fish. Woohoo."

The family had barbecue plans for the fish.



"He will get eaten," promised Mr. Keen.

At the other end of the river, eight-year-old Matthew Krijner sat patiently on his new tackle box using the new rod he got for Christmas.

"I was so excited I got sick on Christmas," he said.

The Optimist Club of Stratford has been running the event for more than 25 years, and multiple generations have gone down in all kinds of weather to fish.

Byron Leader was one of those kids.

"I guess it piqued my interest at an early age. It kept me out of trouble and it was good bonding with my dad. Now I do it professionally."

He won the derby when he was just four years old with a six pounder and now owns The Fishing Store and fishes in professional bass tournaments.

The event usually draws about 1,000 people, said Brian Pearson, trout derby chair.

The derby is free and open to children up to 16 and seniors 65 or older. The winners for biggest fish and draw winners were given a new rod and reel for next year.

Mr. Pearson stressed the derby gives kids a chance to try fishing and he hopes kids learn about the environment and the importance of protecting waterways.

Not all the fish will bite in the four hours of the derby.

"There'll be good fishing for the next few weeks for sure," Mr. Pearson said. "I've come down on Mother's Day and seen people fishing."

The net at the William Hutt Bridge used to contain the approximately 1,200 trout in one section of the river will be removed today.

The kids who caught the big ones are: Mackenzie Chute, 10, first place for a two-pound, 9 5/8- ounce rainbow trout; Shane Schulties, 9, second place with a two-pound, 4 1/4-ounce rainbow trout, and Thomas Macdonald, 7, in third, with a one-pound, 3 5/8-ounce rainbow trout.

The winners of the colouring contest were Ashlyn Witt, Mark Knill, Koleton Shaw, Tarha Keen and Jenna Bouw.

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