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A muskie charter... What a Father's Day gift!

Receiving gifts is usually a surprise and unexpected. This year's father's day gift was definitely a surprise for Wolverine Lake resident Lee Anderson.

"I asked for a golfing rain suit," he said with a laugh. "I got this little bag and when I opened it there was a certificate for a muskie charter."

This wasn't any charter either. It was with Don Miller Charter service, known for muskie fishing on Lake St. Clair. Miller is a renowned fisherman, author, and educator, devoting a lifetime to fishing for muskellunge on Lake St. Clair. His intimate knowledge of the muskies' seasonal movements and habits, combined with the most effective fishing techniques, assure you the highest possible chances for success. Whether you're a novice or an experienced angler, you're going to have a great time, pick up helpful fishing tips, and quite possibly do battle with the Muskie that legends are made of! According to his website he is reputed to be the world's most productive muskie fishery, Lake St. Clair's waters reproduce the Great Lakes strain of muskie.

Although Anderson lives on Wolverine Lake and fishes there for bass, pike and bluegills, he's never had the urge to fish for muskie.

"My sons Bryan and Andy, son-in-law Steve Loftus and my three grandsons Jayden, Corey and Connor all went along. Connor Loftus is eight and caught a 36 inch muskie," Anderson said.

Anderson had high praise for the way Miller conducted the charter. "This turned out to be an 8 1/2 hour trip for the seven of us. Don was a super guy and treated us royally. He showed the kids where to stand when we were trolling, where to move to on the boat when we hooked a fish, and told them to move to the other side of the boat while we netted it. He had the kids pick out lures to use. It was fun for all of us," he said.

"Pap, you get the first hit," the kids told Anderson. They drew cards for the second hit.

"Steve Loftus and Connor were up. When they got a strike, Steve handed the rod to Connor.

"He started winding the fish in and quickly remarked, 'Dad, it's stuck.' But he eventually got his 36-inch muskie in," Anderson said.

Fishing for muskies is done in a couple of ways. Some cast big body baits of jig for them. Known as the fish of a thousand casts, be prepared to spend some time casting. Trolling large spoons or spinners behind wire leaders is popular. Muskies are opportunistic feeders taking waterfowl or rodents when available.

Miller, who has been fishing on Lake St. Clair for 30 years, believes, "A clean six beats a dirty dozen!" Which

By Roger Beukema means Miller likes to keep it simple while trolling St. Clair. He

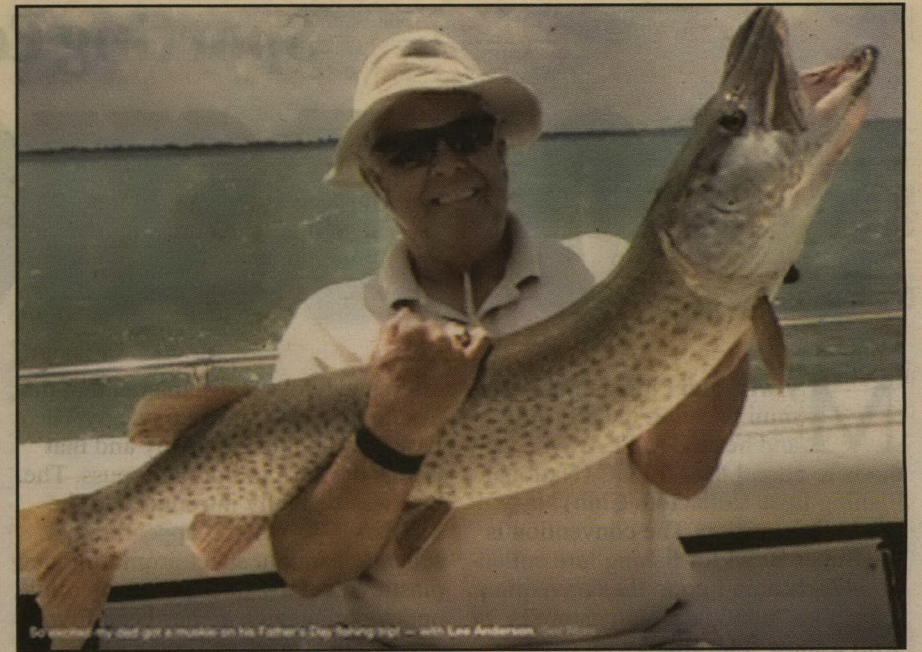
puts six lines out, making it easier to keep these lines free of weeds and foul-ups as opposed to running 12 lines allowed for 6 people on the U.S. side (1 line per person on the Canadian side).

Miller, a student of the late, great Homer Le Blanc, said, "I fished with Homer and one of the keys to his trolling pattern was to cover as much water as possible. This is done by a combination of speed and lure placement. Speed is critical. I troll from four to six, sometimes seven miles per hour and I cover lots of water for the maximum amount of muskies to see your bait. But, I let water clarity dictate how fast I will troll."

His philosophy is that muskies are not easily duped into striking artificial baits. Therefore, he says, "I speed up to 6 miles an hour in clear water but slow down to 4 miles per hour in muddy or cloudy water. This prevents a muskie from getting too good a look at his offering, making them make up their mind instantly, and producing a reaction-strike."

A typical St. Clair trolling spread is used, with two 4 to 6-foot down-rods running very close to the boat, right in the prop wash. Two more 8 to 10-foot out-rods are set parallel to the water at a 45 degree angle to the back of the boat. Two planer boards, one on each side, are utilized.

"This was a great trip. We had a little different weather thrown at us from



Wolverine Lake resident Lee Anderson with 49 1/4 inch Lake St. Clair muskie.

time to time. It would change from flat calm to wind and rain. When I caught my fish, my son Andy had to hold me up because we were rocking quite a bit. It was neat," he said.

The Michigan DNR and Ontario MNR are managing Lake St. Clair as a trophy fishery with a minimum size limit of 44 inches. Catch and release is widely practiced and the catch rate and size is getting more spectacular each year. Multiple fish days happen frequently and many muskies over thirty pounds are caught every year. Muskie season on Lake St. Clair runs from the first Saturday in June to December 15. Early summer finds the U.S. waters of Anchor Bay to be very productive. "It holds a lot of fish early. Then it weeds up fast," says Miller.

As summer progresses Miller fishes the Canadian waters, where he works the 10 to 20 foot depths off of Belle River, Ontario. Another Canadian summer hotspot is an area known as The Dumping Grounds, located in the south-

east portion of the lake. Miller runs his lures shallow and uses his lure spread and boat to comb these sporadic depths of 8 to 18 feet.

During the fall the pattern changes again. A good majority of St. Clair's muskies migrate back to the U.S. side or northern end of the lake. Bigger muskies are targeted and bigger lures like a 10-inch, jointed Believer are used to catch the big females that swim as shallow as 6 to 8 feet. He uses natural colors on favorite baits like Wileyes, Eppinger Spoons, Believers and Gran-nies.

Book your muskie fishing charters with Captain Don, and see why muskie charters with him on Lake St. Clair are so popular. Contact Don Miller at (734)-429-9551, email, dsmiller2@comcast.net, www.millers-sportfishing.com.

The fish Anderson caught was 49 and 1/4 inches, qualifying as the third largest caught in Michigan this year, according to the DNR. What a great Father's Day gift! ■



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