



"To Share With Others"



Outdoor Writers Association of California

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PACIFIC ISLANDER HITS THE LIMIT ON ROCK-FISH, LING COD

BY BOB SEMERAU

Staff writer
Western
Outdoor
News
Oxnard—Perfect weather and a steady bite made for an excellent overnight outing aboard the 73-foot sportfisher Pacific Islander.



Twenty-one anglers boarded Pacific Islander at the Channel Islands Sportfishing dock in Oxnard for a 10 p.m. departure last Friday night, excited at the prospect of filling the freezer.

"We will check out the conditions in the morning so be ready to fish a two-hook rig with about 6-to-8-ounces of weight. We'll arrive around dawn, possibly near San Miguel Island," explained the skipper, Captain Steve Virtue.

The smooth run around the backside of the Channel Island group made for a good night's rest once everyone bunked down after rigging up. The rigs are simple two-hook affairs with size 2 Trokar hooks being the go-to choice.

As the morning sun crested the western hills of Santa Rosa, Pacific Islander ran past the island and across the open water passage to a spot just offshore from San Miguel to start the day. A couple of abbreviated drifts showed the current was good, but not too strong, allowing use of smaller, 6-ounce weights.

In just moments dedicated ling-smith Song Kim, of Los Angeles, pulled in a scrappy, legal ling cod, on his way to an easy limit of three.

With twenty-one anglers at the rails soaking baits, both cut squid strips and live sardines, and some tossing jigs, the catch was soon under way. Despite all the excitement of getting fish early-on, Capt. Virtue called for lines up and Pacific Islander returned to Santa Rosa in search of a stronger bite.

Several drifts and anchor stops brought some results and 14-year-old Devon Radish nailed his first-ever legal ling cod along with a couple of nice reds. Young Devon was out with his dad, Steven Radish, for Devon's birthday outing and both agreed a day off from his school in Camarillo could be spared. The two anglers wound up with limits on ling cod and rockfish both.

Keith Edgerton, 26, fished with his folks as well, and he and his mom could usually be found pulling on rockfish or ling cod throughout the day.

Brothers Francois and Olivier Bernard, a pair of Frenchmen living in Bali, had come out for their first offshore fishing experience and finished the day with limits all around.

After several moves mid-morning, Capt. Virtue positioned Pacific Islander at a special spot offshore for Santa Rosa and a steady bite broke out on ling, reds, sheephead, chucklehead, and whitefish.

Los Angeles angler, Jay Cho, secured his status in the ling-slayers club by boating a bruiser bucket-mouth ling that went on to take the jackpot, even up against some serious sheephead challengers. One of those challengers belonged to Yakov Radze. Yakov, who goes by Jack, fished with pal, Eddie Vaysburd, both in the automotive dealer business and from Van Nuys; two

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of the nicest guys you could ever meet. The trip was special for Yakov as it was only his second time fishing but with the help of his pal, Eddie, and a very attentive deck crew, Yakov managed to boat a limit of ling and a huge sheephead along with the rest of his rockfish limit.

With limits in the bag, the time to head back to the Channel Islands Sportfishing docks came just after 1:00 p.m. and the final call for lines up was met with high-fives and toasted with a few cold-ones. The final counts showed the success of the day: 210 rockfish, 63 ling cod, 3 sheephead, 4 bonito, and 22 whitefish.

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Hide, Survive, or Thrive?

Peter Schroeder

"Would you rather be part of three million people who visit the Park in summer or just 100,000 who arrive in winter?" asked Rick Hoeninghausen, director of sales and marketing for Xanterra Parks & Resorts, which runs concessions in Yellowstone National Park. While guiding our group on cross-country skis through Yellowstone last winter, Hoeninghausen continued, "With fewer people, it's quieter in winter; there are no cars and animals are easier to spot against the snow with no leaves on the trees to block views. Herds come down from the mountains and you see more wildlife in the meadows: bobcats, antelope, foxes and bison.

As we glided past steamy geothermal features deep into the woodlands, we kept a respectful distance from the occasional moose and herds of elk and bison while admiring the snow-covered park. With our added speed on skis, we continued deeper into the woods than summer hikers would normally go, giving us views of Yellowstone National Park that few have seen.

"In winter, all wild creatures adopt one of three strategies during the harsh winter months: Hide, Survive, or Thrive," Hoeninghausen explained. Bears and many smaller animals hide by hibernating in dens or burrowing underground. Elk, bison, and deer barely survive as they struggle through snowdrifts to forage for food--and try to avoid predators such as wolves and coyotes.

Meanwhile, wolves, coyotes, and moose thrive. With their large paws, wolves and coyotes can run on the top of snow and have ready pickings of the slow-moving elk, rabbits, and creatures more restricted in their movements. Moose, with their unique leg joints, can easily move through snowdrifts while their coats of hollow, insulating hairs enable them to stay warm in winter storms.

The same three options are available to humans. Unfortunately too many of us simply hide during winter. We close ourselves indoors like hermits in the comfort of our homes and offices only occasionally emerging for a breath of fresh air.

But the wolves and moose among us see winter in a different light. This is the time to change our lifestyle and get outdoors to thrive in a sometimes harsh, but stunning, environment, where there's less competition for the magnificent sights that the winter landscape has to offer.

The biggest excuse for remaining indoors is the frigid temperatures. But there's no such thing as being cold; there's only inadequate clothing. Get the right wardrobe, rent or buy the right gear, and join those who thrive outdoors throughout the solitary and spectacular months of winter.

From the Editor Meade Fischer

I was saddened to learn that our Richmond conference had to be cancelled. After all, we only get to see each other twice a year at best. A number of issues got in the way. They were planning on a much bigger crowd than we usually muster, and for a number of reasons far less people signed up than usual. The result: huge venue, small group. It simply didn't work.

We are making plans and back up plans for Spring 2016. You'll know what we came up with in the Dec. issue.

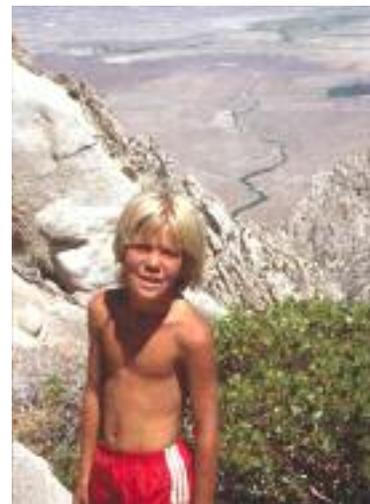
I do want to thank the people who came forward with articles for this issue. Finally, I can get back the excitement I felt when I first took over this chore. Keep the good writing coming in, and don't forget to keep in touch with others in OWAC during the times between conferences.

While Spring is still unsettled, we are certain of Morro Bay in the fall. This is shaping up to be an incredible conference, so even if you usually don't attend, plan on this one.

Nature Boy to the Natural

Carol Martens 12/12/13

Once upon a time there was a boy named Aaron who because of his family and surroundings became known as "Nature Boy". Forty years later he has



matured into "The Natural".

As I write about Aaron, it has occurred to me that each one of us could take

time and reflect on our lives and the steps that were taken to bring us to where we are today? I'm convinced that career choices begin to form in early childhood. If you read this article carefully, take note how many of Aarons' past experiences helped to make him the Angler he is today? There will be a quiz so on with the story...

My husband Jerry and I married as children in 1960 and had two sons, Brian and Chris during our first four years of marriage. Originally we wanted four children but after having two boys we decided that two were all we could handle! Jerry was fresh out of Chicago and I was a California native born in Santa Monica. Our family quickly adapted to an outdoor lifestyle that included hiking, camping, running and biking. Jerry chose swimming pool service as a career so he could be outdoors. I became a Skin Care Consultant and Manager for Jafra Cosmetics so I would have my own hours. Everything was good for those first ten years.

And then surprise, Aaron made an unexpected appearance in 1972. It was

like starting all over again. However, he didn't slow us down. Before Aaron was born, he was driven across the Shasta Lake bridge (where he has fished many times since) and camped in our VW van while his dad climbed Mt Shasta. He also made some short trips with his fat mama and family to the Sierras. Soon after he was born we took him bike riding and hiking in a backpack and spent days in the High Sierras before he was two. In 1974 we made a move just a few miles away to our current home in West Hills on the Chatsworth Reservoir. Our home put us on the edge of a nature wilderness for a back yard. We really loved it and still do.

Thinking back, Aaron was never your average, neighborhood kid. He had curly blond hair and loved going shirtless and barefoot. He was tan all year round just like his dad and reminded me of Tarzans' kid or Pecos Bill. Most of his playtime at home included hunting for lizards, bugs and other critters he and his brothers could stir up. For toys, he loved ant farms, bug and butterfly catchers and jars with holes in the lids. Eventually, the boys convinced us to build a chicken coop and buy some Rhode Island reds and then some ducks. We enjoyed fresh eggs for years! When the chickens and ducks were eventually gone (we also had raccoons and coyotes), we acquired a herd of pigeons for our coop. Unfortunately, they were homing pigeons and always came back when we let them loose. We were the only ones in our neighborhood with an animal menagerie! We always had more than two or three dogs, a cat, snakes, rats, a tortoise and bunnies. The wildlife kept coming as if we were Noah's Ark! Eventually Aaron got the fish aquarium he had always wanted and took good care of it even though I said he wouldn't. By now you have a picture of our family. It also explains why some people would hesitate coming over! They still share stories of the snakes that got loose in the house and the pigeon that landed on their head as they walked up to the front door! Just a side note, Aaron would often fill his mouth with a variety of live bugs and greet people with a big "Hi" and to their shock, the bugs would fly out. No one else ever tried that. Now you have a really good picture of the crazy Martens' family. Even if it was gross, we would do anything for a laugh. Somewhere during this time Aaron became known as Nature Boy and it stuck! According to some, he still performs shock and awe for his friends.

Besides nature, Aaron had other interests. He would do things like take apart a Casio watch and put it back together again just to see how it worked? He would also draw a maize and challenge us to find the way out? He loved volcanoes, dinosaurs, rainbows and sports. We subscribed to Bassmasters Magazine and watched all the fishing shows. Watching Hank Parker, Jerry McGinnis and Bill Dance among others definitely had an impact on Aaron and me. I even taped them on VHS so we could watch them over again. I still have some of those vintage tapes and magazines. I would also love to have a dollar for every time Aaron said he wanted to fish Bassmasters and be the youngest to win the Classic. What happened Aaron? I know, you'll do it even if you aren't the youngest, just don't be the oldest. To tell you the truth, most of the time we secretly thought he was dreaming.

Aaron latched on to fishing early with the encouragement of his big brothers. Every year we would go to the Sierras or Sequoias camping and hiking. Fishing for trout was usually part of it even though we didn't always have fishing tackle with us. Once I remember Aaron asking me to help him find used line and hooks on the shoreline, plus the boys were experts at finding and catching live bugs for bait and still are. They liked looking around the brush and under rocks and logs to see what the



fish might be eating? Aaron also enjoyed tinkering with baits and rarely used them in their original state. He would sit in the family room for hours clipping, painting and inventing his own baits and loved testing them in the pool or on his next fishing trip. When I couldn't drive him somewhere to fish, he would grab his rod and a pocket full of tackle and ride his bike to a private, local lagoon for the afternoon. As his interest grew, he and his brothers liked to fish on the pier at the beach while I sunbathed. Then one late afternoon on Malibu Pier, I told the boys it was time to go home. They said we couldn't go because the fish were biting and it was then Aaron convinced me to reel in a mackerel he had hooked. I did so and exclaimed this is fun! I became instantly hooked. Aaron and a mackerel did what no trout had been able to do.

Long before we ever had a boat we would sneak into golf courses and private lagoons to catch a fish and hide in the bushes when security came around. With a constant hunger to fish, we would rent boats on our local lakes, but found they never gave us enough time? It seemed the fish would always bite the best when we had to return the boat and it was still light out! There were many times we would fish off the docks or shoreline just to make one more cast like Shaw! There was a defining moment early one morning in our rental boat at Lake Casitas. As we were heading out, we were rocked by dozens of bass boats leaving the marina in a bass tournament. Aaron looked at me and said "That's what I want to do!" Just like my first mackerel, the heavens opened, the sun shined down and those words were written in stone.

Meanwhile, since we still didn't have a bass boat, we did have an inflatable raft that we used to fish kelp beds in Santa Barbara and for trout in the mountains. In 1987, Aaron and I went car camping for ten days in the Sierras with our sports car, inflatable boat, tent and our dog, Eddie. Our goal was to fish every lake, marsh, and stream we

Martens from pg. 3

could find. To this day that still remains one of my fondest memories. During 1988 we bought our first bass boat, joined a bass club and fished our first tournament. We both had the passion and willingness to learn the ropes and we did so quickly! Within a year we began fishing a couple of bass circuits and that was pure heaven. From the beginning we started cashing checks and collecting trophies. But there was a lot more to it.

During this time Aaron was in high school. He was also on the varsity volleyball team. About 9 years earlier, his brother Chris was on the varsity championship team and we were looking forward to Aaron following in his footsteps! Alas, it became apparent that Aaron had to make a decision to either play in volleyball tournaments or choose fishing tournaments because both involved Saturdays? During one of our arguments Jerry said “there is no money in fishing!” and I said “there is no money in volleyball!” There is only a few arguments I’ve won in over 50 years of marriage and this was one of them.....oh and buying our first boat! In defense of volleyball...it was one of our favorite sports and Jerry and I played weekly for years. I was the only woman most of the time, but being as tall as I am I could spike and block with the best of them. But I digress... in addition to volleyball and fishing, Aaron also loved bowling, soccer and baseball. All of these sports required good eye and hand coordination which Aaron was blessed with as well as excellent eye sight and other senses.

From the beginning we took our fishing seriously. We did lots of fun fishing, but we also worked long hours pre fishing for our tournaments. So much so that I would take Aaron out of school early to practice. His teachers always made sure he was caught up and completed his work. One time a shop teacher brought out the whole class to watch us drive away . The teacher really wanted to join us!

Speaking of driving away, I feel this is a good place to stop. There is so much more to share! Some of you may be reading this in hopes of finding the magic formula in becoming a successful angler someday? As Aarons’ mom, that’s the burning question I’m always asked? How did Aaron do it? The answer is complicated and that’s why I’ve waited until now to reveal the full picture. Next time I will address subjects such as endurance, finances and skills, all from experience of course! In future articles, Aaron has asked me to interview his Pro buddies and find out some of the things they have gone through to propel them to where they are now and how to stay there? What makes they people unstoppable? I can’t wait!



Yosemite: New concessionaire, but few changes planned

By Tom Stienstra Published 12:05 am, Monday, October 12, 2015

The color of the high-country aspens isn't the only thing changing in Yosemite National Park.

A new concessionaire, Aramark, was announced last week as the choice to implement a new recreation plan. After a winter of transition, Aramark takes the job March 1.

A consortium of environmental groups had pushed to eliminate the ice rink, bike rentals, rafting and horseback rentals. Some also pushed hard to eliminate the High Sierra Camps. The groups also wanted to take out the historic Sugar Pine stone bridge, built in 1929, among other things.

After an initial decision in spring of 2014, the park formally announced its plans last week.

The biggest short-term change is that horseback riding will be moved out of Yosemite Valley to Wawona near the southern boundary (near Highway 41) of the park. That makes sense. There are fewer people and trail access is better.

But the outdoor ice rink, a great experience for youngsters and their parents, will open again this winter for its 86th year. The location will change as it moves back to the east side of Curry Village, where it first opened.

Many didn't understand why anybody would want to eliminate bike rentals. It seems logical instead to do everything possible to get people out of cars and on foot or bikes, or at least into environment-friendly shuttles. Bike rentals instead will be available year round at Yosemite Lodge at The Falls and at Curry Village, with 12 miles of paths available.

Though the Merced River is a trickle right now, an El Niño-driven winter could mean improved rafting flows in the spring and early summer. The plan calls for rafting trips to stay, with a quota of 100 trips per day.

The Yosemite Mountaineering School will continue at Badger Pass, Curry Village and Tuolumne Meadows. All the High Sierra Camps will stay. The Sugar Pine stone bridge will not be torn down.

Aramark will run The Ahwahnee, Glacier Point, Yosemite Lodge, Wawona, Tuolumne Meadows Lodge, High Sierra Camps, and Curry Village. The improvements at those properties, not elimination, will be the real story.

Tom Stienstra is The San Francisco Chronicle's outdoor writer. E-mail: tstienstra@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@StienstraTom](https://twitter.com/StienstraTom)

Invasive Species Kathie Morgan

A yellow dog sniffed our 13-foot Valco last week at Lake Sonoma Marina, looking for quagga and zebra mussels. All he smelled, I believe, was a perfume blended of unequal parts fish attractant, striper and halibut slime, deck shoes, spilled Pepsis, and sunscreen. Give that dog a bone for taking on a job that most of us won't do for any amount of money.

One trend among the Save the Earth crowd has been to lament, and if possible prevent, the spread of "invasive species." I get it, in a way. I'm not happy about the purslane that seems bent on taking over my vegetable garden. But it's not all bad. My neighbor down the lane comes by to help himself because he and his family eat lots of purslane.

I forgot to ask him whether they ever eat zebra mussels. Visiting several Don't Move a Mussel websites led me to wonder if the mussels are worth the money being spent to keep them away. I read lots of what they could do and might do, if

When I looked for what they have already done, I found an Outdoors Now story by Dave Orrick telling of a Wisconsin lake where bass and panfish have benefitted from the 1998 introduction of zebra mussels. Some folks worried that the lake's sturgeon might not fare so well, and indeed their main food source dried up for a time. And then it came back, so the sturgeon are just fine.

Species have been moving around forever. This migration is a good thing, generally, as creatures move in response to changes in their habitat. If the grass is greener on the other side, grass-eating species will move to the other side. We saw deer feeding at water's edge, that day of the dog, nibbling on the sparse greenery there because the hills above the lake are so dry.

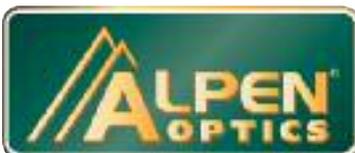
Take the Galapagos Islands. People travel from around the world to view plants and animals that all migrated there from elsewhere, and we should thank our lucky stars that no watchful environmentalists were on guard to make sure none of them took hold.

I'm a native Californian who loves to fish. Now that I fish primarily fresh water, I hate to think what I'd fish for if the invasive species were removed. My favorite right now is the striped bass, first introduced to California in 1879. OWAC member Bill Adelman likes fishing for American shad, introduced to the West Coast about the same time as stripers.

Largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted bass are invasive here. So are crappie, bluegill, sunfish, pumpkinseeds, and tilapia. Catfish are not native, nor are carp. Brown trout, brook trout, lake trout, Colorado cutthroat trout, and kokanee – all undocumented border-crossers.

In fact, besides your rainbow and steelhead trout, your five species of salmon, and your sturgeon green and white, about all you've got are hardheads, chubs and suckers.

Casting for invaders, therefore, I'll be looking for you on the banks.



News from Big Bear EL NIÑO FEVER HITS BIG BEAR

Big Bear Community is Optimistic El Niño Will Bring a Long Snowy Winter

BIG BEAR LAKE, Calif./ November 5, 2015 – The most talked about subject in Big Bear these days is El Niño, especially because Southern California experienced scarce winters the past three years. This year however, El Niño is expected to turn things around.

Weather experts are predicting a weather pattern that could bring ample snow for an epic ski season. In fact, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration claim there is a 95 percent chance El Niño will continue through Northern Hemisphere winter 2015-16, gradually weakening through spring 2016. If weather experts are correct, this could be a mega year for precipitation. With that being said, the community of Big Bear is optimistic and excited that El Niño could bring an abundant amount of snow to the mountain resort.

"We're treating this year's El Niño like a major event," said Big Bear Mountain resorts Director of Marketing Clayton Shoemaker. "And we're itching to get this El Niño party started." Earlier this week Big Bear received a dusting of snow. This is an early indicator for local Big Bear business owners that El Niño is on its way, which could significantly help increase business this winter. Both local business owners and skiers/snowboarders will benefit with a strong presence of natural snow this season.

"Our fingers are crossed for a long white winter. We're hoping for the best," said Big Bear Visitors Bureau Director of Operations Rebecca Hrabia.

DUSTING PROMPTS GUESS SNOWFALL CONTEST – WIN A SEASON PASS!

Guess the First Six Inches of Natural Snow Accumulation to Win a Big Prize

BIG BEAR LAKE, Calif./ November 4, 2015 – Mother Nature made an appearance in Big Bear Lake this week with a dusting of snow. This teaser has prompted officials of the Big Bear Visitors Bureau to launch a Guess the First Six Inches of Snowfall Contest that awards one lucky winner the choice of either a season pass to Big Bear Mountain Resorts or (4) two-day passes to Big Bear Snow Play.

“This is a great promotion to kick off the winter season and gives our guests a chance to win an awesome prize,” said Big Bear Visitors Bureau Director of Operations Rebecca Hrabia.

To date Big Bear has received one inch of natural snow from the recent dusting. To qualify, participants must enter the date they think natural snow will accumulate the first six inches (or the next five inches) for the 2015-2016 winter season. Snowfall must accumulate a minimum of 6 inches of snow in Big Bear Village. Guess the First Six Inches of Snowfall Contest launches Wednesday, November 4, 2015, and all guesses must be submitted on BigBear.com by Wednesday, November 24. In order to qualify participants must fill out the entire entry form, including name, email and phone number. Participants who guess the correct date are entered into a random drawing to win their choice of either a season pass to Big Bear Mountain Resorts or (4) two-day passes to Big Bear Snow Play, for the 2015-2016 season, non-holiday. There is no purchase necessary to enter. Limit one entry per household. This offer may not be used in combination with any other Big Bear Visitors Bureau offer or promotion. One winner will be selected one week after the first official snowfall in Big Bear. The winner will

be notified by email and/or phone. Prize must be claimed two weeks after notification. The contest is available at BigBear.com. Big Bear Visitors Bureau reserves the right to make all final decisions of the Guess the First Six Inches of Snowfall Contest. Rules are subject to change. Other restrictions may apply.

For all there is to do in Big Bear Lake, to book reservations for the holidays or anytime this winter call 800-424-4232 or visit BigBear.com.

Big Bear is gearing up for the much-anticipated Godzilla El Niño winter season!

In fact, we’ve already had two small snowstorms that have helped get the ski resorts open early for the season.

We have BIG NEWS to announce next week. The type of news your audience will be grateful to know. Next Wednesday, November 18 Big Bear will offer its guests the opportunity to purchase lift tickets to Snow Summit and Bear Mountain for just \$15 (80% off) during a 48-hour window (11/18 – 11/20) bundled together with 25% off lodging accommodations. In other words, we’re going to kick off this Godzilla El Niño with a BANG! This is unprecedented in the ski industry to offer such an absurd price, but we want to create a real buzz for the upcoming season.

I’ve attached a press release that is embargoed until Tuesday, November 17. Please look it over to get a better idea of what we want to portray. I appreciate you spreading the word.

**Thank You,
Dan McKernan**

Director of Marketing & Public Relations

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**For more information visit
www.costadelmar.com.**

**View this email in your
browser**

Red bass caught in the crystal blue waters of Christmas Island.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas (Island):
New GEOBASS Episode Follows Anglers on Red Bass Adventure**

Daytona Beach, Fla. – Oct. 30, 2015 – The GEOBASS around-the-world epic bass fishing adventure goes far to the crystal blue waters of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean for the latest episode, premiering today online at costadelmar.com/geobass. This time on an oceanic quest for red bass, the GEOBASS four decide to bring along a fifth wheel: a greenhorn college student from the University of the South in Sevannee, Tenn., Jared Zissu, winner of the GEOBASS “Casting Call” contest.

After an exhaustive-yet-somewhat-futile research attempt on the red bass species, the anglers set out on their journey, only to be waylaid by debilitating stomach illness. The team powers through, despite rough weather and unsanitary conditions, with one goal in mind: to find and catch the red bass on fly.

The newbie Jared learns quickly fishing in saltwater is a completely different game from the freshwater trout streams where he cut his teeth. But while the experienced anglers work to show him the ropes, Jared proves victorious by overcoming the illnesses that quickly take his mentors down.

Along the way, the group encounters huge schools of bonefish and milkfish, and tries their hand at landing some giant trevally (GTs).

“We weren’t sure if the kid was

Cont on pg. 7

going to be able to hang with us,” said Thad Robison, GEOBASS angler. “But he quickly proved himself – after a few learning curves – and showed us he had what it took to be part of our journey.”

Viewers can catch all of the GEOBASS action at www.costadelmar.com/geobass. Season One DVDs are also now available to catch up on any episodes fans might have missed. About Costa™

As the leading manufacturer of the world’s clearest polarized performance sunglasses, Costa offers superior lens technology and unparalleled fit and durability. Still handcrafted today in Florida, Costa has created the highest quality, best performing sunglasses and prescription sunglasses (Rx) for outdoor enthusiasts since 1983.

For Costa, conservation is all about sustainable fishing. Many fisheries that should be vibrant and healthy are all but devoid of native fish because they have fallen victim to poor fishing practices, unregulated development, lack of watershed protection or all of the above.

Costa works with partners around the world to help increase awareness and influence policy so that both the fish and fishermen of tomorrow will have healthy waters to enjoy. Costa encourages others to help in any way they can.

For more information, contact 1-800-447-3700 or visit the company’s web site at www.costadelmar.com. Join the conversation on Facebook at www.facebook.com/costasunglasses, on Instagram at www.instagram.com/costasunglasses, or on Twitter @CostaSunglasses.



MOUNTAIN LAKE ESCAPE

Del Mar plans kick for home in fall meet Ed Zieralski

Track president Joe Harper believes second half with concerts, promotions, more stakes will attract fans

By Ed Zieralski | 6:27 p.m. Nov. 13, 2015

del mar — With attendance sagging and on-track handle lagging, Del Mar President Joe Harper appears to be taking in stride the slow first half of the second Bing Crosby Season.

Going into this week, attendance had decreased 44.1 percent, on-track handle had declined 32.3 percent, and overall pari-mutuel wagering was down 4.2 percent compared with Del Mar’s inaugural fall meeting last year. Harper, though, is reminded of a fall meet at Santa Anita in 1969, the start of Oak Tree at Santa Anita.

“I’m disappointed with the low crowds, but I look back at my first job in track management, and it was at the Oak Tree meeting,” Harper said. “Early in the Oak Tree meet, it was exactly the same. The numbers in the fall were a fraction of what they drew in the regular meet. That’s 1969. Nobody showed up. No one had ever seen Santa Anita that empty because Santa Anita on the rainiest, most miserable day in the winter would get 15,000 people. On the good days, they’d draw 70,000. When the Oak Tree meet started, people actually thought it was a harness meeting in the fall.”

Del Mar drew 3,044 fans on Thursday, its smallest crowd of the fall season, followed by 3,084 Friday, its third lowest. Del Mar is averaging 4,646 fans through the first 10 days of this 20-day meeting.

Harper said horsemen tell him they are enjoying the meeting. As for fans, what perplexes him most is that people still say they don’t know that fall racing is going on at Del Mar.

“The horsemen like the track, the payouts; everything is fine except we’re just not drawing,” Harper said. “Somehow we have to find a way to get our summer people to come out and see fall racing. Someone said to me, ‘Joe, don’t be depressed. How many do you think Saratoga would draw in November?’” Like Saratoga, Del Mar is a summer party.

“Del Mar, we’re famous for our summer racing,” Harper said. “We’re not famous for our fall.”

Harper said the meeting was purposely back-loaded with more concerts and giveaways, starting Saturday with a Del Mar fleece pullover handed out to every fan attending. Harper reiterated what he said at the start of the meeting: He and his lieutenants were concerned enough about the slip in attendance last summer that they launched a marketing survey campaign to see if fans can provide answers to Del Mar’s woes.

“That survey will tell us a lot,” Harper said. “We may do more cross-promotion in the summer for the fall meeting. We’ll also take a hard look at how to get the summer folks here in the fall. But you have to remember that a lot of our summer crowd is visiting from other places, other states. I’m not seeing a lot of Arizona and Texas license plates out there.”

That’s why, for now, no one can remember seeing Del Mar this empty. Jockey appealing ban

Jockey Felipe Valdez is appealing his seven-day suspension handed down Friday for what stewards ruled to be careless riding on his mount, Di Giorgio, in the seventh race on Thursday. Michael Burns, Valdez’s agent, said his client believes that the penalty was too severe for the infraction. Valdez was suspended Nov. 19-28. Del Mar’s fall season ends Nov. 29.