

Kelowna Yacht Club – Blind Fishing Derby

By Larry Lefebvre

The purpose of the KYC Blind Fishing Derby is to have a focused, annual event that brings our local blind community together with our boating community.

Comments from the blind community after these events have been very positive. They appreciate the KYC members for giving their time and resources for this special event. Happily, our KYC members were also grateful, stating they received so much more from this interaction than expected and wanted to help it again next year.

We've been hosting such an event for much more than 15 years. In year 2000 we hosted 8 guests. Then in year 2002 we decided to go in a '*new direction*' and opened the event to any blind person in our community, regardless of their club affiliation or organization for the blind. Our numbers started to grow. Bill Mah was instrumental in registering our guests since he was well respected and connected with various local organizations for the blind. We also wanted to make it more than just a fishing derby. Many of our guests just want to go for a cruise and most don't catch a fish, so we introduced additional, fun features.

In 2004 we purchased a large trophy (with Braille) for our club that is updated each year with the winner's plaque. It was engraved "In Memory of a past Commodore Dudley Pritchard", an ardent supporter of the event. His very active wife Eleanor, who is blind herself, wanted the event to be called the 'Kelowna Yacht Club – Blind Fishing Derby'. The event winner gets a 'keeper' trophy and many other prizes are given out to our guests at the subsequent luncheon. Articles were written for the newspapers and they were published with pictures. Press releases were sent to all the local media and they sent photographers and TV camera crews for the evening and nightly news. KYC's image and participation grew with more publicity of KYC's community involvement.

By the 2005 derby, we invited 24 blind guests and 16 guides for a total of 40 guests. For last year's 2013 derby, we invited 24 blind guests and 14 guides for a total of 38 guests, plus 15 KYC boats and many KYC volunteers. We filled the clubhouse with many happy people.

Once again this year, the staff and volunteers of the Kelowna Yacht Club have extended an invitation to blind, visually impaired and their guides to participate in the annual fishing derby for the blind. I have been pleased for close to 10 years to be associated with this event in the capacity of promoting the event to the blind community and guides.

Bill Mah's Story

My relationship with this derby goes back even further. I am not sure of how this event got started at the Club but I still remember in the late 70's, I attended this derby. During that time, I was in grade 11 or 12. I was invited to participate through the District Manager of the Canadian National Institute for the blind (CNIB). Throughout the 80's, 90's and most recently, I have had the pleasure of being involved as a fisher person in this event. I half to admit, I have not attended all of these years but have always been aware of this event and when possible, attended if college or work didn't interfere.

I don't always have easy access to our beautiful Okanagan Lake. And what a gem we live so close to. The derby each year allows me to be reacquainted with the lake and meet some extraordinary boat owners that give so much to make this day happen. The hospitality that is offered up is first class. I realize the owners of these boats could be out doing other things on their boat. But for 3 hours each year, they put their busy schedules aside to make us a part of their day. Thanks skippers and volunteers!!

We are close to another event and I hope that all of you consider volunteering your time to be a part of this event. I don't believe that words can say how much it is appreciated by the persons that come out.

Bill Mah