

# Milton • Means Business

## Fishing fanatic hoping new line catches on

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
*The Champion*

**T**erri MacKinnon has hooked on to her fair share of fish, and is now hoping to reel in a share of the fishing industry's business as well.

Her bid to do so officially begins later this month at the Toronto Fishing Show, where she'll launch FisherGirl — a line of gear designed specifically for female anglers, something the market's been more or less lacking until now.

"The launch will be fairly small-scale, with among 300 units of rods," explained the 47-year-old Miltonian. "But there's plans for everything from poles and lures to fishing clothing and outdoor cosmetics. We're even hoping to have a tournament called Cast for the Cure eventually. Some venture capitalists have said this could be a \$100-million business within three years.

"About 23 per cent of anglers in North America are women and it's an eight-and-a-half billion dollar industry, so there's certainly potential to make a difference."

To hear the local entrepreneur talk about fishing, one might think she was born with a rod in her hand. But truth be told, she was only introduced to the sport six years ago by boyfriend-turned-husband Andre MacKinnon.

And at first, the idea didn't exactly catch on.

"He said, 'I'm going to teach you to fish so you can feed your family'. I said no thanks, I just go to the grocery store," she quipped.

But an ice fishing trip to Bon Echo Provincial Park, near Belleville, just a month later got her — well, completely hooked.

Recalled Ms MacKinnon, "It was so much fun. I thought we'd be freezing, but it's quite cozy in the hut and you can actually see the fish through the hole, which is pretty entertaining."

While an instant fishing lover — or fishergirl, as would-be hubby dubbed her — she found the sport's equipment and clothing a little on the masculine side. All black or green rods weren't exactly to her liking, while most poles were just a little too heavy.

Not long afterwards a light bulb went off — ironically enough, at a time when she had a lot more on her mind than fishing.

With her emotions all over the map in 2003 — with her sister's mastectomy, father's battle with prostate cancer and the birth of her granddaughter — Ms MacKinnon tuned into an episode of Oprah Winfrey that would spark an idea that was part plan, part purpose and all unique.

**"I asked my friend, 'If I could make you a pink fishing rod would you want one?' She said, 'How many can you make me, because I'll need one for everybody in my family'."**

**TERRI MACKINNON**

"She (Oprah) said if you can find something you're passionate about and that you can make a difference at you'll never go wrong," explained Ms MacKinnon. "I looked out the window at my friend out in a paddle boat and thought this (designing women's fishing gear) is what I want to do. I asked my friend, 'If I could make you a pink fishing rod would so want one?' She said, 'How many can you make me, because I'll need one for everybody in my family'."

Seeking guidance from a host of industry experts — including U.S. bass fishing champion Kathy Magers — Ms MacKinnon quickly established FisherGirl and has been pouring herself into every phase of production and marketing ever since.

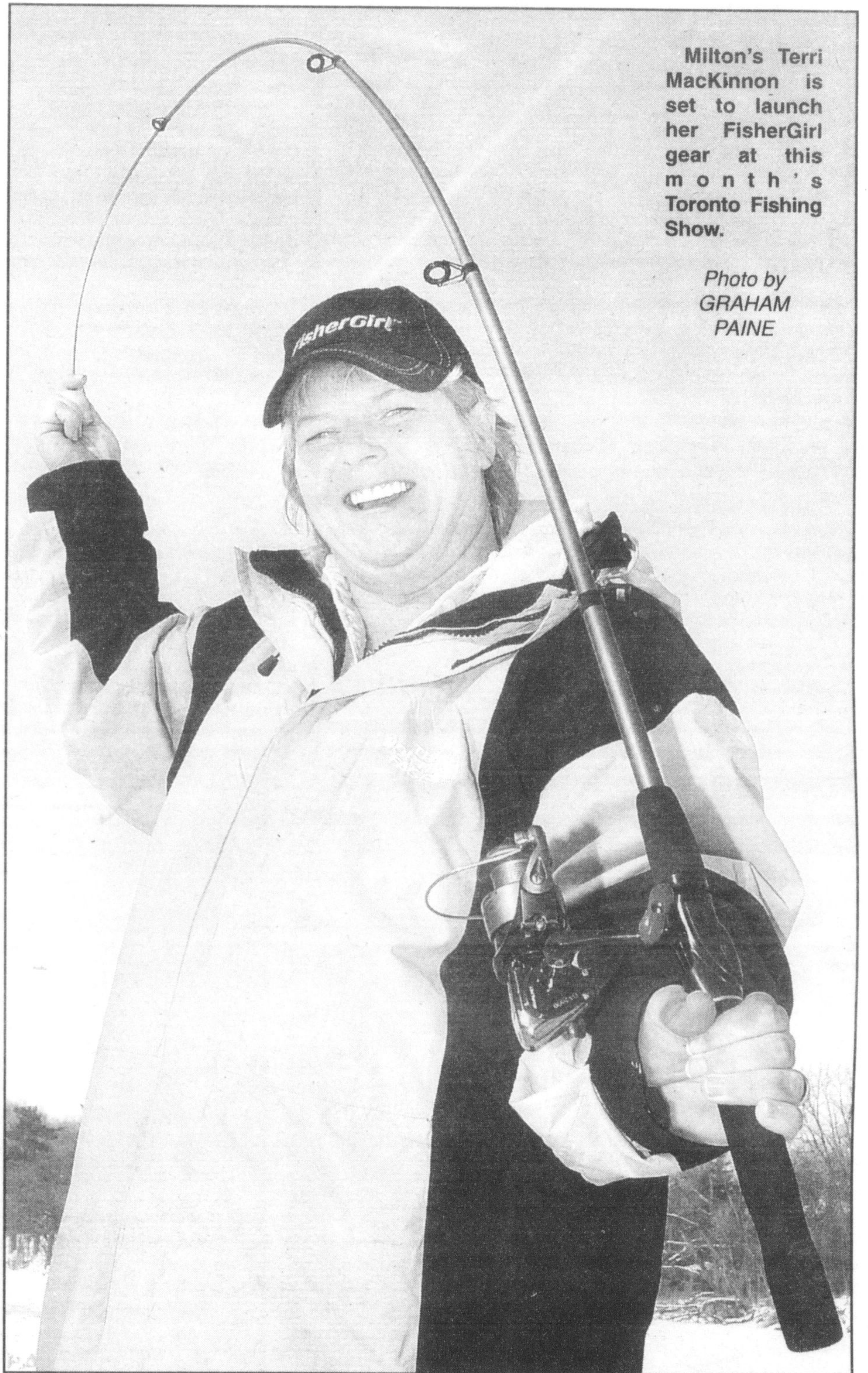
"It's absolutely incredible just how much she's taken to this. I mean the first time we went ice fishing she wore little boats and a mini skirt," joked Mr. MacKinnon. "I can see great success in this (new line of gear). There's certainly the market for it."

Getting FisherGirl off the ground has meant an awful lot of work — much more so than during her years in the travel agency racket. But it's been a definite labour of love, and not just because she adores fishing. "Ten per cent of all sales are going to the Breast Cancer Society of Canada, in honour of my sister," said Ms MacKinnon. "I want to do my part in wiping out this horrible disease that's claiming so many young women. I want to make sure my daughters and granddaughter are around."

"I want to give something back. I'm a firm believer in 'paying it forward'. But this really isn't about me. I'm just the vehicle for all this."

FisherGirl products can be seen at the Toronto Fishing Show from February 17 to 20 at the International Centre, or by visiting FisherGirl.com.

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Milton's Terri MacKinnon is set to launch her FisherGirl gear at this month's Toronto Fishing Show.

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