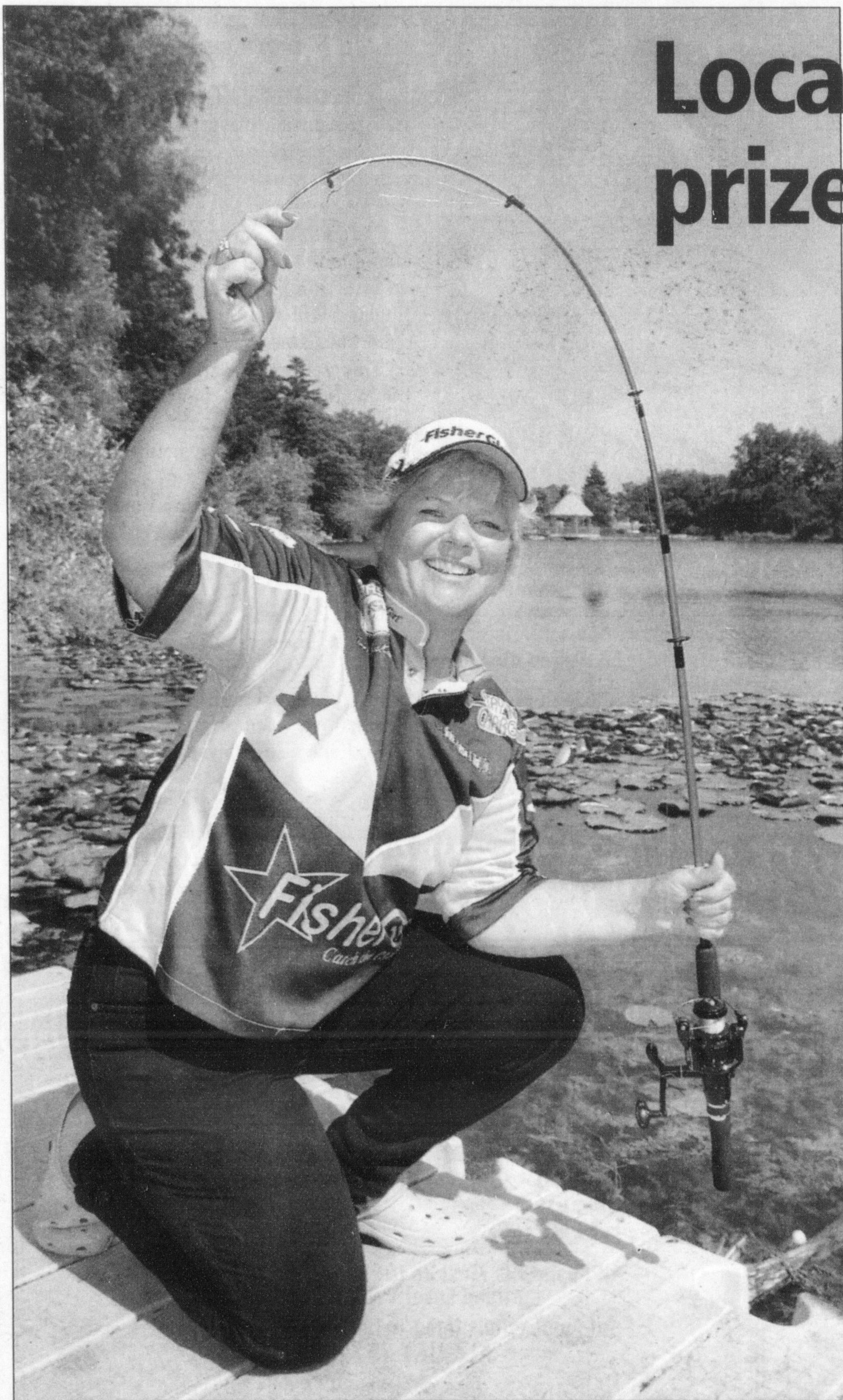


SPORTS

SPORTS EDITOR: STEVE LeBLANC e-mail sleblanc@haltontsearch.com



Local angler reels in cash prize on Bassmaster tour

First Canadian woman to finish in the money

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Terri MacKinnon's love for fishing has once again paid off — literally. Jumping head first into the competitive circuit this year, the avid angler finished in the money late last month at the third stop on the new BASS/ESPN Women's Bassmaster Tour.

Catching fish on both days amidst sweltering conditions on North Carolina's Lake Norman, the creator and minority owner of FisherGirl — a line of gear designed specifically for female anglers — placed 20th among roughly 200 competitors from across North America and abroad.

She reeled in \$500 with the finish — determined by total weight of each competitor's two-day haul — and became Canada's first woman to earn a paycheque on the international tour.

Thrilled with finish

"Yeah I guess I can consider myself a professional angler," said the 47-year-old Miltonian, who was only introduced to fishing seven years ago by boyfriend-turned-husband Andre. "I've now got career earnings on my card."

The cornerstone of Team FisherGirl — which includes seven U.S. anglers and three from Canada — MacKinnon had come up empty-handed at the tour's first two events in Alabama and Texas this spring.

"I'd catch some fish on the pre-competition days and then nothing once it started," she explained. "Or I'd catch fish other than bass or ones that were too small (less than 14 inches long)."

That trend looked like it would continue on Lake Norman, as the local angler headed into the final stretch of each day without anything to show for her efforts. But her choice of pumpkin-coloured senkos — complementing the lake's red-clay edges — would

eventually draw them in, with her second day's catch coming in the final hour of competition.

"It took a good half-hour to bring him in because he went down and wrapped himself around two logs," said MacKinnon.

That type of lengthy battle is just one of many challenges involved in competitive fishing — which the local angler stressed is far from the leisurely cottage activity many envision. And it's tough to argue that claim.

Can be grueling

After all, getting up long before dawn to stand in a boat for eight hours — often in intense heat or a steady downpour — is hardly what one would consider relaxing.

Throw in the occasional encounter with an area's wildlife, and the sport can be dangerous as well as exhausting.

Recalled MacKinnon, "In Alabama we had a (poisonous) copperhead snake climb into our boat. The woman I was fishing with had to knock it out. To see this thing come out of the water was pretty terrifying, and I guess it's common because before we went out they gave us a manual to study in case we were bit by anything out there."

Combine this with the strategy involved, and there's no shortage of excitement when it comes to competitive fishing. Adding to the enjoyment level, MacKinnon said, is the enthusiasm and camaraderie seen among participants, at least among the female ranks.

"Some reporters have told us they don't see that nearly as much with the men."

MacKinnon and her Team FisherGirl mates have two more tour events left this summer in Arkansas and Missouri. Looking ahead to next year, she plans to spend more time in the States to hone her craft and still has plans for FisherGirl to establish a charity tournament next year — likely in Ontario.

"A few years ago I couldn't have imagined fishing competitively, but now I can't think of anything I'd want to do more," she said.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

HOOKED ON FISHING: Terri MacKinnon is all smiles after her strong showing recently on North Carolina's Lake Norman.

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