

DESPITE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN, PLENTY OF ENTHUSIASTS STILL WETTING LINES LOCALLY

Recession has anglers reeling in plans

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You can take the boy out of fishing, but you can't take fishing out of the boy.

Not even during bleak economic times.

"I'd say in times of a recession, people will still find a way to carry out their favourite hobbies," veteran tournament angler Dave Chong says.

"I don't see that changing. People need an outlet for relaxation and leisure."

The Aurora resident's assertion was evident during an early season outing on Lake Simcoe. Close to 100 vessels were out on the waters of this province's sixth-largest inland lake on a weekday.

Aurora Bassmasters conservation director Wil Wegman says the sport may be at its healthiest state ever.

"I would say I saw more anglers this past winter enjoying the great old fashioned winter than I have in quite some time. Even during mid-week occasions when I had a chance to go out, it appeared as if numbers were up," he says.

"Weekends were a zoo on Lake Simcoe. It made me wonder if more people were laid off and that's why numbers were up — especially mid-week. On weekends, I saw more families so perhaps many parents realized the inexpensive activity of angling can still allow them to get their kids out and have fun.

"Kids fishing events like the Uxbridge Huck Finn event on opening of trout season saw over 1,000 kids and their families fishing Elgin Pond in Uxbridge," he adds.

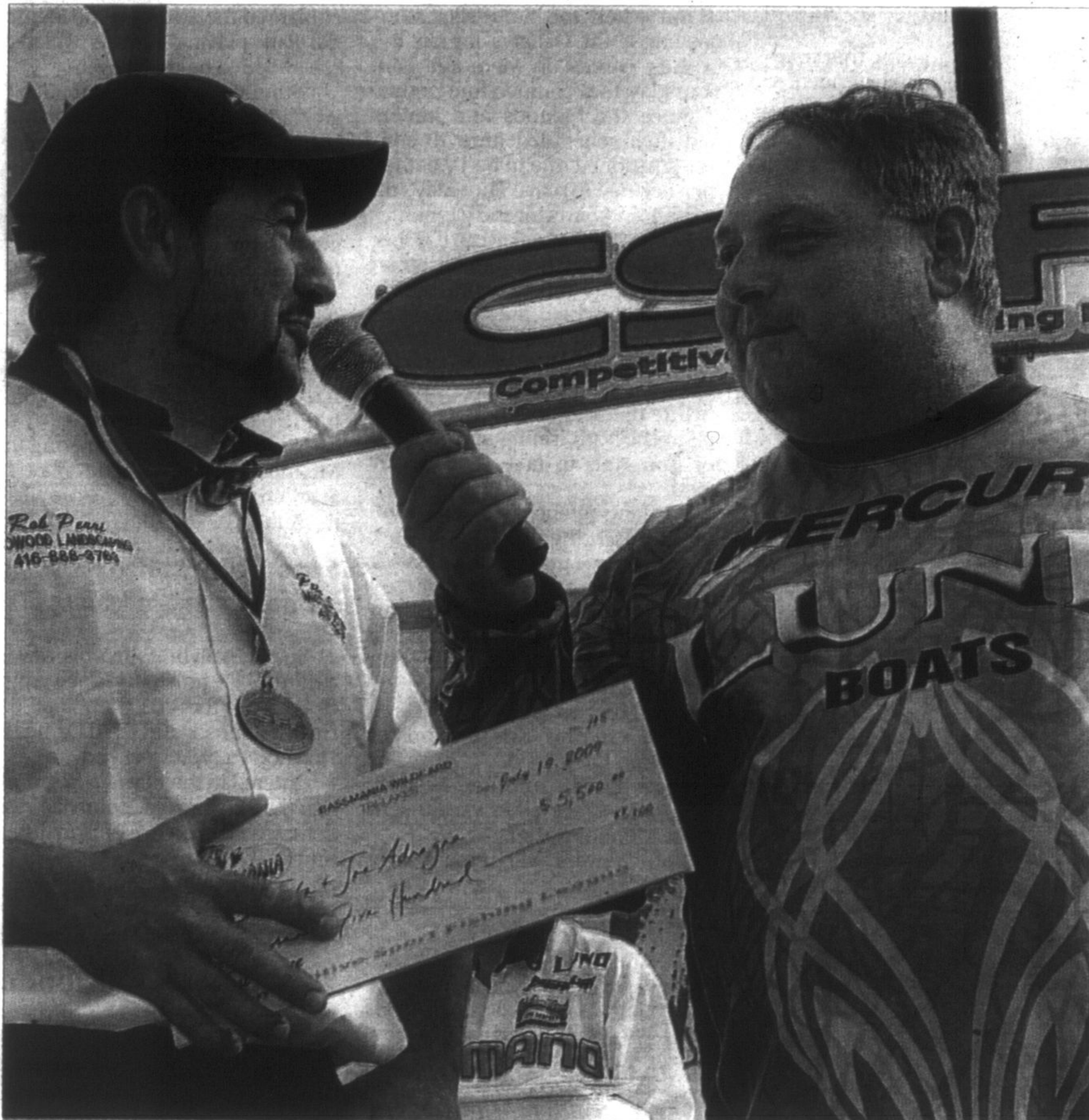
The recession may force anglers to stay closer to home and cancel plans for trips to far-away spots.

While they may not catch an exotic species, such as an arctic char or grayling, some good smallmouth or largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike and muskie fishing exists within driving distance, Mr. Chong says.

"People might not do a fly-in fishing trip, but they will still find a way to do their hobbies," he says.

Mr. Wegman agrees.

"If the recession continues, we may see a shift in the type of



While some anglers may be putting off trips to exotic destinations these days, those with a passion for the sport will find ways to keep fishing, tournament organizer Andrew Pallotta (right) of Stouffville says.

angling adventures people take part in," he says.

"But, overall, I don't expect anglers to spend less time wetting a line or fewer of them doing it. They'll just evaluate the cost of each outing more and adjust accordingly."

A regular participant on the bass tournament scene, Mr. Chong thinks entries in live-release competitions could be affected. Costs for travel, gasoline for the boat and overnight accommodation have to

be added up.

"They will still fish tournaments, but not do as many," Mr. Chong says.

Mr. Wegman, who also fishes tournaments, feels the die-hard tournament angler will always find an event in which to participate.

"I think we'll see more anglers turn to less expensive club tournaments to fill that competitive desire so many of us anglers have," he says.

Competitive anglers will pay close scrutiny to what events might net the most in return. Among those that could be appealing is the annual Bass Pro Shops Lake Simcoe Open Oct. 24.

"I expect they will continue to host a full field because they offer over 125-per-cent paybacks, incredible incentives and a reasonable entry fee," Mr. Wegman says of the Lake Simcoe event.

Andrew Pallotta, founder of the Competitive Sport Fishing League,

knows the Ontario tourney scene. Entering his 15th campaign of staging events, the Stouffville resident says his pre-registration numbers remained fairly stable for 2009.

'Whether it's golf or fishing, I think people who are driven by passion will continue to do what they're doing.'

Stouffville's Andrew Pallotta,
founder of the Competitive Sport
Fishing League

"I think any passion-type of sport has stronger participating opportunities because they're reality-based. Whether it's golf or fishing, I think people who are driven by passion will continue to do what they're doing," Mr. Pallotta says.

And anglers are still buying up gear.

After conducting angling seminars during the winter at the Bass Pro Shops outlet in Vaughan and other retail outdoor centres across the province, Mr. Chong concluded anglers will always have enough funds stored away to purchase items.

At least in terms of basic terminal tackle, said Tom Cheng, proprietor of Angling Specialties in Concord.

"People who go fishing will always buy items like hooks, line, sinkers, floats and live bait," he says. "It's business as usual."


Mr. Pallotta also runs the Spring Fishing and Boat Show at the Toronto Airport Convention Centre in February.

Attendance increased to 18,000 this year from 12,000 in the inaugural campaign last year.

This year's show included some of the top tournament anglers from the U.S. and Canada as guest lecturers, which, in turn, may have spurred added interest.

Sport fishing still remains a popular activity regardless of how the economy is faring, he insists.

"I think people need to find ways to relax," he says.



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