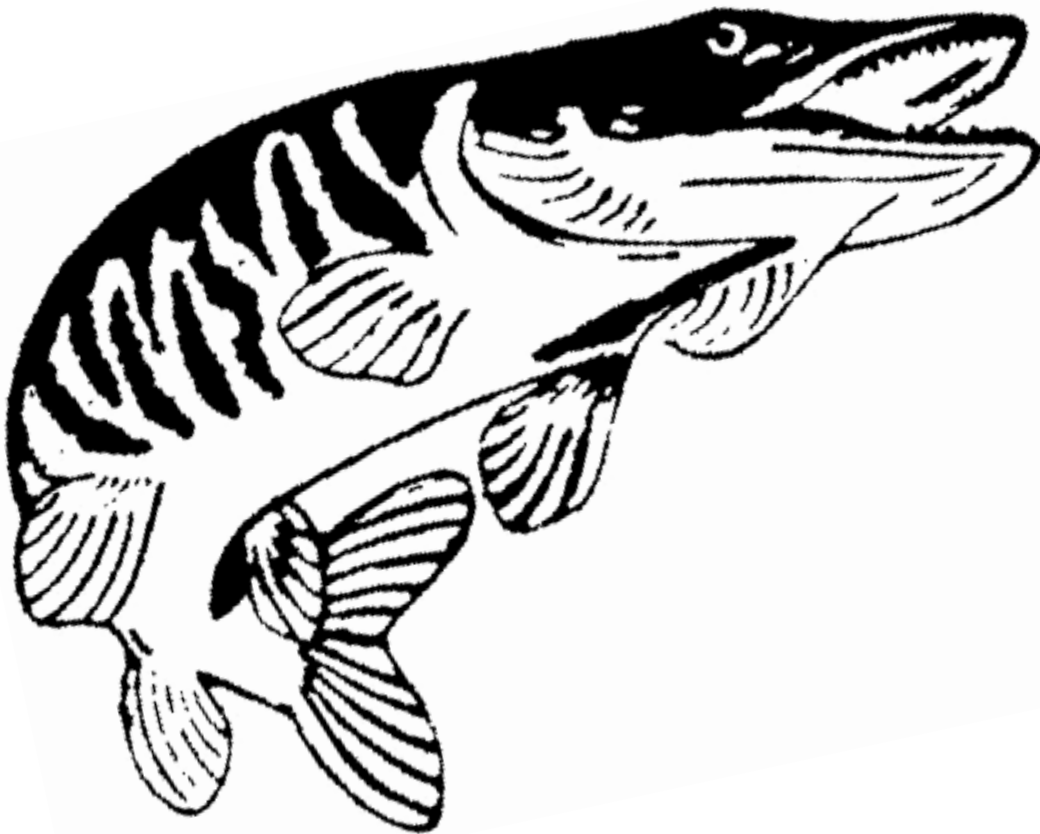


# **National Championship Musky Open Remembered**



**27th Anniversary  
August 17th - 19th, 2012**

# Open draws record 1,111 anglers

## Minocqua man wins tourney with six muskies

By GARY RIDDERBUSCH  
NEWS-REVIEW EDITOR

The National Championship Musky Open was a record-setting event as the most popular fishing tournaments in the Midwest attracted 1,111 anglers to 72 Eagle River area lakes Friday through Sunday.

Jeff Van Remortel of Minocqua was the top fisherman and 11-year-old Cullen Rogacki of Colgate was the luckiest ticket holder in the 27th annual tournament, headquartered at the Vilas County Fairgrounds.

A total of 196 tournament-size (34 inches and over) muskies were registered in the three-day event, another record. The previous record was 193 fish established in 2006. While most anglers fished just Saturday and Sunday, fishing on Friday was optional.

The tournament is sponsored by the Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center and the Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin. The record number of anglers from 15 states topped the old mark of 1,109 anglers in 2007.

### Top anglers

Van Remortel won the tournament by catching six muskies, the most fish ever caught and released in the tourney. He had fish measuring 35, 36, 36½, 37¼, 39¼ and 39½ inches, for a total of 223½ inches, another record. He won a first-place trophy for his effort and was proclaimed the national champion by tournament master of ceremonies Steve Heiting of St. Germain, editor of Musky Hunter Magazine.

Fishing on High and Fish Trap lakes, Van Remortel said he caught his fish on Bull Dawgs and Bull Tails.

The largest fish of the tournament was boated by Patrick Nelson of Gillett. He caught a 49½-inch muskie on Kentuck Lake using a bucktail at 7:10 a.m. Sunday.

"My son had it up to the boat with a figure eight but



The top anglers in the Musky Open were, front row from left, Jeff Van Remortel, first; Tim Blazek, second; Mark Lynch, third; back row,

William Kucksdorf, fourth; Mike Bruggink, fifth; and Tom Pollack, sixth.

—Staff Photos By GARY RIDDERBUSCH

didn't hook it," said Nelson. "About 20 yards down the shoreline, it hit my bucktail."

### Boat winners

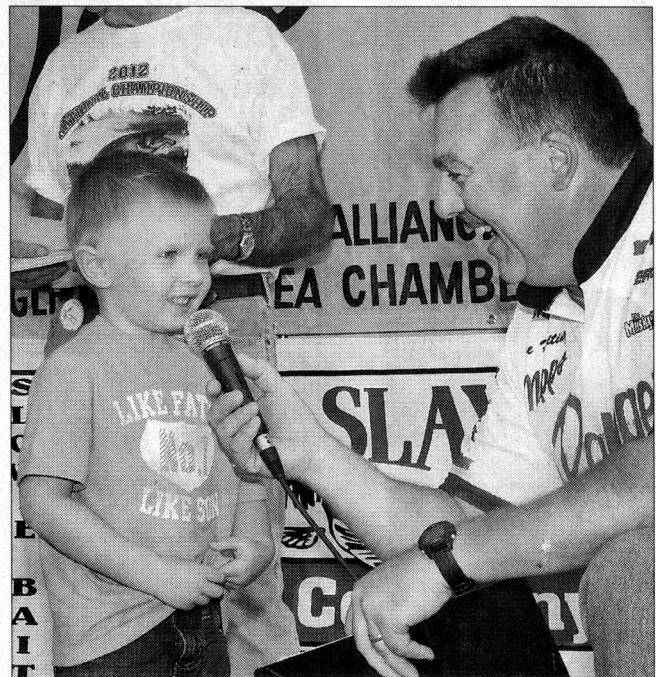
Rogacki, who has been fishing in the tournament with his dad, Blair Rogacki, for the past three years, won the grand door prize — a Ranger boat, 115-horsepower Mercury motor and Minn Kota electric motor.

"When I heard my name announced, I screamed and ran to the stage," said the young Rogacki, sitting in his new boat and being congratulated by many tournament participants.

"We have always talked about winning the boat, but never believed it would happen," said Blair Rogacki, who caught a 44½-inch fish in the tournament.

While only anglers who entered the tournament for

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Tournament emcee Steve Heiting interviews the youth winner, 6-year-old Tommy Wallschlaeger of Three Lakes.



# OUTDOORS

## Open

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\$55 had a chance at the top door prize, a second identical fishing boat package was given away by the Musky Clubs Alliance following a summer-long fundraising raffle. That winner was Gary Zdroik of Eagle River, who was not entered in the tourney and was not at the awards program Sunday.

Besides a boat as a top door prize, anglers had a chance to win more than 200 other door prizes Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon — ranging from muskie baits to rods and reels to huge landing nets. All anglers received a free hat and T-shirt. More than \$40,000 in prizes were awarded during the tournament.

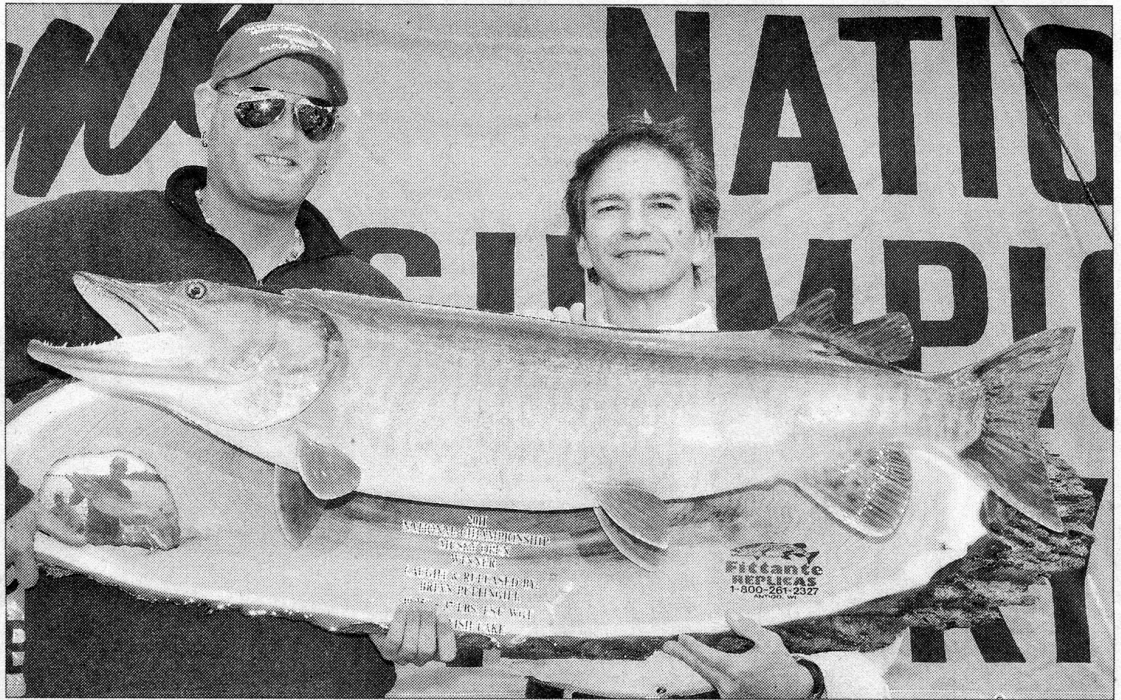
### More winners

The 196 muskies registered in the tournament were caught Friday, Saturday and Sunday on seven lake groups comprised of 72 bodies of water. The fish were registered by other tournament anglers right on the water to improve the muskies' chance of survival.

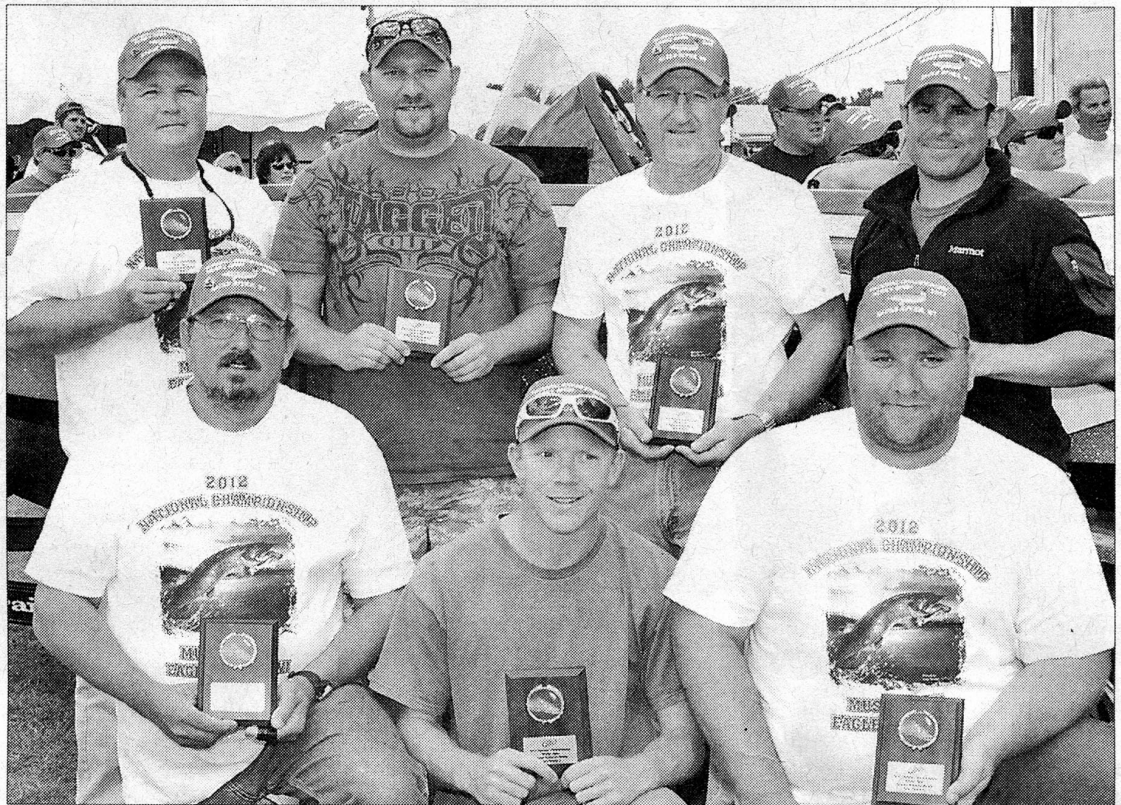
Trophies, courtesy of Miller Beer of the Northwoods, went to the top fishermen and -women.

Placing second in overall points behind Van Remortel was Tim Blazek of Colgate. He caught four fish measuring 34½, 36¼, 36½ and 40¼ inches. He was fishing on Lost Lake in the St. Germain lake family casting chartreuse bucktails.

Third place with three fish went to Mark Lynch of Hatley, who was fishing Kentuck Lake. He caught fish measuring 37½, 43½ and 44½ inches.



Antigo taxidermist Joe Fittante, right, presented a replica of last year's largest fish to angler Brian Pettingill of Indianapolis, Ind., who caught the 49¾-inch lunker in the 2011 tourney.



Catching the largest fish in each of the seven lake families were, front row from left, Patrick Nelson, Eric De La Garza, Chad Rosinski; back

row, Blair Rogacki, Tom Pollack, Michael Kleman and Steve Strait Jr.

—Staff Photos By GARY RIDDERBUSCH

Fourth place went to William Kucksdorf of Tomahawk, who also registered three fish measuring 37½, 38½ and 46½ inches. He was fishing on the Eagle River Chain of Lakes.

Fifth place went to Mike Bruggink of Tomahawk, boating three fish measuring 34½, 35 and 46 inches. He was fishing on the "big lakes" family around Phelps.

Tom Pollack of Weston placed sixth with two fish measuring 40 and 46 inches. He caught his fish on the Sugar Camp Chain of Lakes.

Trophies also went to the anglers catching the largest fish on each lake family as follows: family one, Patrick Nelson, Gillett, 49½ inches, Kentuck; family two, Eric De La Garza, 45 inches, Little Fork Lake; family three, Chad Rosinski, Conover, 46½ inches, Lac Vieux Desert; family four, Blair Rogacki, 44½ inches, Big St. Germain Lake; family five, Tom Pollack, Weston, 46 inches, Little Arbor Vitae; family six, Michael Kleman, Hatley, 46½ inches, Buckatabon Lake; and family seven, Steve Strait Jr., Milwaukee, 43 inches, High Lake.

Nelson also will receive a reproduction of his fish, the largest of the weekend, at next year's tournament. Completing the reproduction will be taxidermist Joe Fittante of Antigo. Brian Pettingill of Indianapolis, Ind., was presented a reproduction Sunday afternoon of last year's largest fish registered in the tournament. It was a 49½-inch muskie caught on Catfish Lake.

The husband-and-wife team trophy went to Michael and Janice Kleman of Hatley with their one fish measuring

46½ inches. There were a record 72 teams in the husband-and-wife category.

Six-year-old Tommy Wall-schlaeger of Three Lakes took home the youth trophy with his 40½-inch muskie. There were 56 youths age 15 and younger entered in the tournament.

The guardian/youth trophy went to Todd Schulz and youth Tanner Schulz of Merrill for registering two muskies measuring 40 and 41 inches.

#### Special awards

Several awards were presented Sunday afternoon. The Bob James Memorial Award went to Bob Haase of Fond du Lac for his involvement in the Winnebago Land Muskie Club and the Muskie Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin.

The late Bob James was a Midwest sales representative for Ranger Boats who helped start the tournament 26 years ago.

The Mike James Memorial Award, a scholarship to a student in the fisheries program at UW-Stevens Point, also was presented. The late Mike James was the son of Bob James and also was instrumental in supporting the tournament.

All the anglers also were congratulated for the Help Fight Hunger program in support of the Vilas Food Pantry. Each angler was asked to take a nonperishable food item and, in return, each angler would receive one chance at winning a Shimano rod and reel for their donation.

"Thanks to this program, the participants donated more than 3,200 pounds of



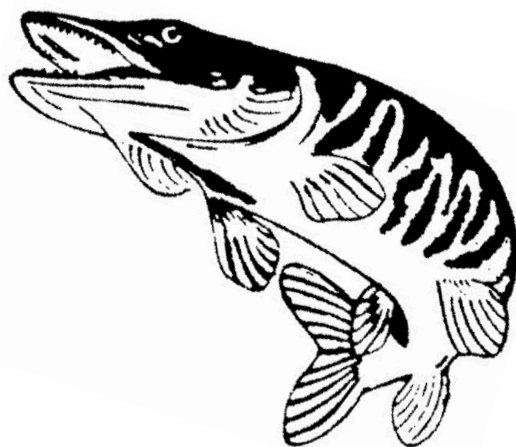
The guardian and youth team trophy went to Todd Schulz and his son Tanner Schulz, both of Merrill.

nonperishable food items to the Vilas Food Pantry, the most ever in the seven years this program has been running," said Kim Emerson, chamber events coordinator. The pantry also received more than \$2,500 in cash donations.

Before sending more than 1,100 fishermen and women

on their way home Sunday, Heiting reminded the muskie hunters that next year's tournament was set for Aug. 16-18, 2013.

Article from the:  
Vilas County News Review -  
August 22, 2012





# Our View

## Musky Open results show high-quality lakes, fishery

The 27th annual National Championship Musky Open drew a record 1,111 anglers from 15 states, once again showing the popularity of a format where anglers fish muskies for the sport of it and win prizes based on the luckiest ticket holder.

Those so-called "muskie hunters" caught a record 198 muskies that measured 34 inches or better in just three days of angling, breaking a record established in 2008. We believe that shows the general health of the muskie fishery and the quality of the lakes in this area.

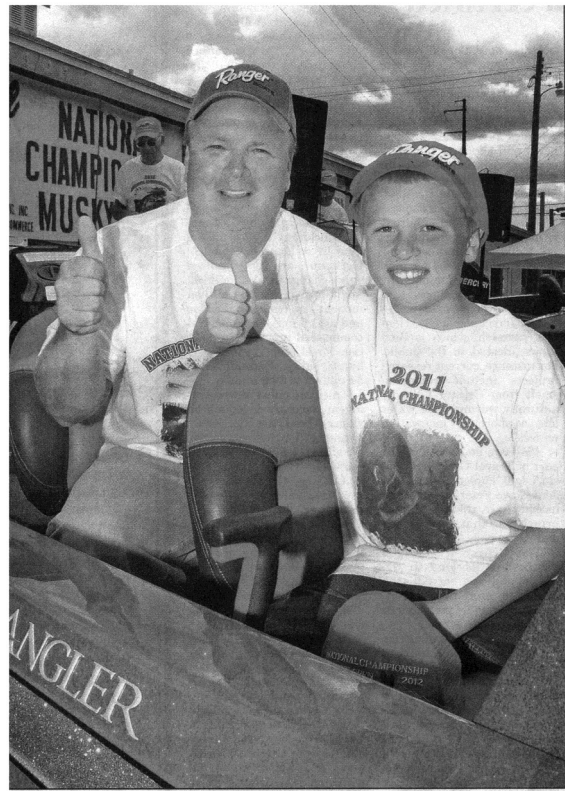
The credit goes to a conservation-minded state that protects its resources and muskie anglers who not only practice catch and release, but also support stocking efforts.

Congratulations to big-fish winner Patrick Nelson of Gillett, who caught a 49½-inch muskie on Kentuck Lake Sunday morning. A replica trophy fish will be created and presented to him at next year's tournament.

This is yet another Eagle River area event that relies heavily on volunteers and the coordinating efforts of Kim Emerson of the Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center. We commend them all.

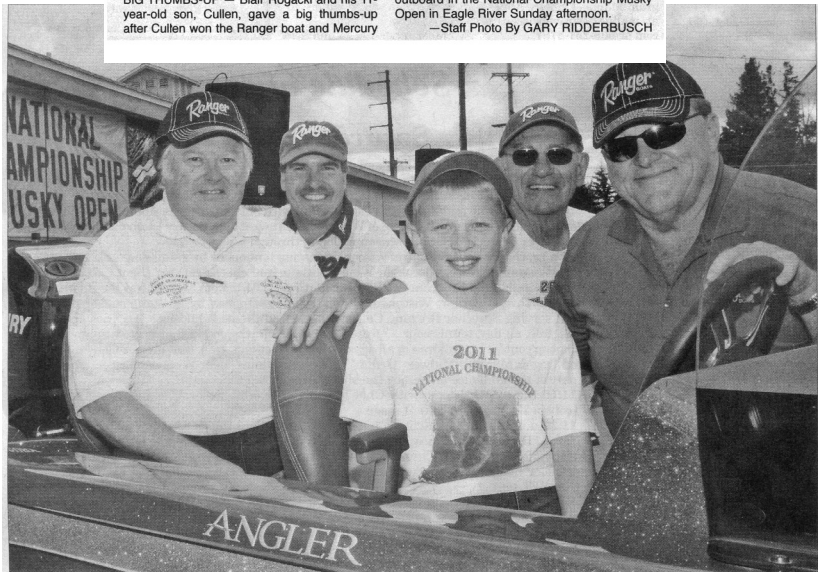
## Behind the editorial 'we'

*Members of the Vilas County News-Review editorial board include Publisher Kurt Krueger, Editor Gary Ridderbusch and Assistant Editor Anthony Drew.*



**BIG THUMBS-UP** — Blair Rogacki and his 11-year-old son, Cullen, gave a big thumbs-up after Cullen won the Ranger boat and Mercury

outboard in the National Championship Musky Open in Eagle River Sunday afternoon.  
—Staff Photo By GARY RIDDERBUSCH



**BOAT WINNER** — Eleven-year-old Cullen Rogacki of Colgate, winner of the Ranger boat at the National Championship Musky Open in Eagle River, was surrounded by happy tournament sponsors Sunday afternoon. They included, from left, Eagle River

Chamber Executive Director Connie Heeg, Jon Koch of Schoeder's RV & Marine in Rhinelander, Muskie Alliance President Larry Slagoski and Ranger boats sales representative Steve Lindahl.  
—Staff Photo By GARY RIDDERBUSCH



Musky Clubs Alliance President Larry Slagoski, left, presented the husband-and-wife team trophy to Michael and Janice Kleman of Hatley. They landed one 46½-inch fish.



**RECORD NUMBER** — The National Championship Musky Open attracted a record 1,111 participants last weekend. This was the

scene at the Vilas County Fairgrounds prior to the awards program Sunday.  
—Staff Photo By GARY RIDDERBUSCH