



WHEELCHAIR BOUND OUTDOORSMAN FINDS JOY IN FISHING

Tim Graves Pix Wins Focus On Fish Health Photo Contest

The love of active sports and being in the great outdoors is bred in Tim Grave's bones – even after those bones have let him down. A paraplegic after a car accident caused a spinal injury six years ago, Graves, 27, nonetheless enjoys fishing and hunting from his wheelchair.

"I really got into fishing after the accident," he recalls. "There are a lot of hobbies I can't do anymore. This I can do. And I can do it by myself."

Grave's father, Brian Graves, took a snapshot of his son holding up a 46-inch, 18.5 pound native Muskie caught in Austin Lake in Portage, Michigan, and submitted it to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Inspection Services' Focus On Fish Health photo contest. The picture won in the *Happiest Boater on the Lake* category. The fish was caught using a big 7 foot plastic lure. "Tim was casting, then we heard a huge splash and he starting reeling this big guy in," his dad said.

"Tim has made a remarkable adjustment since the accident," notes the elder Graves. "He owns a pontoon boat and a jet boat and goes fishing up and down the rivers near Portage whenever he gets a chance."

The Graves' were attracted to the www.FocusOnFishHealth.org website because they are avid supporters of preserving the environment, particularly the small lakes and waterways near where they live. "We keep an eye out for invasive species like Asian carp and fish diseases like VHS," the elder Graves says. "Cleaning my boat and equipment is a habit," his son adds.

He points out that no special alterations for his wheelchair were needed on either of his boats. "On my pontoon there's an opening on the front, and I have ramp that lets me get on the Bass Tracker boat from the dock."

Many things attract him to fishing. “It’s the thrill and fun of the catch. It’s being out there in the midst of nature, and it’s a social thing -- going out with my dad and brother and other friends.” Hunting, he notes, is also a sport that he can manage on his own. He mainly goes bow hunting, and he says that he has no problem getting himself into blinds and waiting patiently.

Graves says that he has always been competitive and fishing allows him to compete with his buddies. “My friends like to keep me on my toes,” Graves says with a chuckle. “OK, well, maybe not my toes...”

When he is not fishing or hunting, Graves works for Gordon Food Service, commodity buying and trading for the major food chain. A graduate of Western Michigan University with a degree in business, he majored in supply chain management.

Persons who want to participate in the photo contest can submit photos all summer at www.FocusOnFishHealth.org. New winners are announced every month. Winning photos may be viewed on the site.

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