

## The Spider Man Reveals His Secrets

Paul Poretti, better known in these parts as "The Spider Man," sends greetings from Webster, Wis. Paul, at 78, is one of our national treasures, famous for his hand-tied Poretti Spiders, which are cute as a bug's behind and deadly on bluegills.

Paul has a few dealers around the state who sell his Spiders. To keep them stocked, he ties and glues up about a dozen Spiders an hour.

"It's a mom-and-pop operation," Steady Eddy says, "without mom."

"I use the money from the Spiders — what's left after income taxes — for supporting agencies dedicated to keeping our world fit to live in," Paul says. "If we don't care for what we have, we won't have anything to care for."

You could fill this magazine with the technical aspects of creating those Poretti Spiders from scratch.

"Did you note," Paul asks, "that the Spiders are headless? The two ends of the thread are buried under a special epoxy on the shank. This is achieved by tying most of the Spider with the hook held in the vise by the head and then removing the hook from the vise, swapping ends and then securing the hook on the vise by the eye.

"This permits me to apply a whip finish to the end of the thread. I cut the thread off short, remove the hook from the vise and apply the epoxy with a short probe."

Is that clear?

Paul could go on like that until the ice goes out to sea and the bluegills come in to spawn. But if you're not into the technical stuff, only a little bit of it can go a long way. Steady Eddy says technical stuff always reminds him of the little girl who returned a very big library book to the nice lady at the desk.

"This book," the little girl told the nice lady, "tells me more about penguins than I really care to know."

Steady thinks you'd probably be more interested in the way Paul Poretti handles his bluegills after catching them. He cleans them in his kitchen. No, not in the sink.

"First of all," Paul confides, "I never allow my fish to get warm. I chill them immediately by dumping the contents of my live-bag in the kitchen sink — or in a pail outside

# North Country Notebook



by George Vukelich

— and covering the fish with cold water. Sometimes, I use ice cubes in the water.

"After the fish have been in ice water about a half hour, I drain the fish, put newspapers in the bottom of a paper grocery bag, cover with a layer of fish — just one fish deep. Then I add another layer of newspaper — a folded sheet or so — and on top of the paper, another layer of fish.

"I keep doing that. A layer of newspaper, a layer of fish, etc., until all the fish are in the bag. When the bag is full, I fold it over and stuff the whole works in the refrigerator for several hours.

"When I'm ready to fillet, I cut the newspapers along the long fold and place them on the kitchen table, where I will sit. I turn over a couple of half-sheets of paper to cover the table. Then, I remove a fish from the cold bag and fillet the fish. I use the tip of the knife to place each fillet in a chilled bowl.

"After I park the remaining carcass in a convenient container, I turn the used half-sheets of newspaper up, thus exposing a clean surface for the next fish. When all the fish are cleaned this way, I put the bowl of beautiful fillets right back in the refrigerator.

"I do about one fish a minute, and while I'm filleting I'm also drinking coffee, talking to my wife and reading the old news as it comes exposed when I turn up the sheets.

"We freeze those fillets that are not intended for immediate consumption. To freeze, place the fillets on a cookie sheet that has been covered with cling wrap. I don't let the fillets

touch each other. If it's necessary to add on another layer of fillets, cover the first layer with more cling wrap, or start another cookie sheet.

"Freeze the whole works for a couple days or more, then remove the fillets, place them in a heavy-duty Ziplock bag and return them to the freezer. Scrunch the fillets around so they won't freeze to each other.

"For short-term storage, keep Ziplock bag sealed, removing fillets as you use. Thaw fillets on a dry towel. "For long-term storage, add a half-cup or so of water to the Ziplock bag, shake it up well so all fillet surfaces are wetted, then remove excess water. Again, scrunch the fillets around, so they don't freeze together."

If you go to the trouble of doing all this — Paul says it's not trouble, just "the homage these little jewels deserve" — your bluegills should be so tasty that you can't tell them from fresh ones.

"When you're finished cleaning," Paul concludes, "remove the few scales that might have flown onto the kitchen table, and roll everything up in the newspapers. Of course, you will wind up with a large wad of wet paper, but you will have avoided the normal fish-cleaning process." (Editor's note: Mr. Poretti doesn't say what to do with the "wet wad," but Dr. Plant thinks it would make a fine mulch).

Steady Eddy likes the idea of cleaning fish on newspaper.

"I think," he says, "that our state press should consider putting out a special Filleting Edition every now and again to boost their circulations.

"I don't think Dyna Ann would be crazy about me filleting fish on HER kitchen table, though. But hey, if Paul's wife is still talking to him while he fillets on her kitchen table, it says something about the kind of marriage they have. Maybe a Poretti marriage could only work in Webster, Wis."

Maybe.

But a Poretti Spider could work anywhere.