

Catching the big ones on the big pond

It was not your run-of-the-mill door prize

It all began in May when Congressman Bob Kastenmeier attended the Dane County Conservation League's Awards and Recognition Banquet and his ticket — Number 1818 — won one of the door prizes.

It was, as Steady Eddy points out, not your run-of-the-mill door prize, "matching glass knobs for your screen door."

It was a Lake Michigan fishing trip for two with Captain Gary Schrimpf of AAA Charters out of Sheboygan.

Otto Festge says the congressman was like a little kid when he found out. Then when Otto found out that he could go along, they were like two little kids. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Barefoot Boys With Cheek. A kind of straight-arrow Cheech and Chong.

It's funny how images and perceptions go, but I don't think most people perceive Bob Kastenmeier as outdoorsy or environmental.

It's not as bad as former President Richard Nixon walking the San Clemente beaches in his blue suit and street shoes, but certainly a little more formal than Gaylord Nelson, holding forth in his bare feet at the Brunsweller Yacht Club.

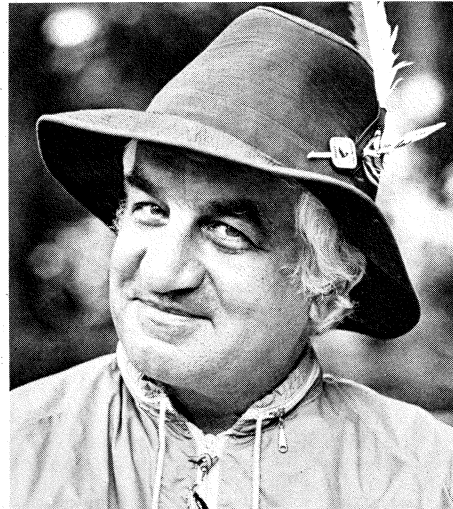
Outdoorsy or not, Bob Kastenmeier is environmental. The League of Conservation Voters in rating the 1980 House of Representatives on environmental and energy issues gave him a 91, the highest rating for anyone in the Wisconsin House delegation. The average score from Wisconsin was 63. The average of all House members was only 48.

That puts him in the top five percent on environmental issues.

"If it was baseball," Steady says, "that's up there with George Brett and the biggies."

That's why it was a singular honor, when Kastenmeier had to cancel out, to

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be asked by Otto to take his place. Then when Otto had to cancel out, I asked Jim Amundson to take Otto's place.

That's the way we Republicans work things.

"Bring a big cooler for the fish," Captain Gary Schrimpf said on the phone. "We're getting them 42-inches long."

Hugo Percy loaned his outsize igloo, the one in which you can park a Honda Civic.

Captain Gary also said to bring along sun glasses and a warm jacket for out on the lake. We were to meet him at The Wharf, a kind of Steady Eddy's with not only bait but beer: Look for a 22-footer. White exterior. Blue interior. Looks like a dolphin. The Schrimpf Boat.

We made connections without a hitch, drove up in the morning, had a smoked trout for lunch at The Wharf, washed it down with a beer and were licking our fingers as Schrimpf Boat showed up. Outriggers, electric downriggers. Blue carpeting. Cuddy cabin. Neat as a pin.

Captain Gary is in his 30s. Eleven years fishing salmon. Four years captain. A little beard. A bigger smile. He's as neat as his boat.

We cleared the harbor, the big lake flat and calm in the noonday sun, turned south and cranked up the 125-horse Johnson. Schrimpf Boat tore down the coast, looking for 53-54 degree water. Looking for King and Coho salmon.

Captain Gary said more and more Madison people were chartering with him because AAA Charters had been at the Sports Show. He also said he had attended the University and had fished "inland lakes" a lot until the salmon fishing spoiled him. His personal opinion was that the Sheboygan fishery was catching on because of its variety.

"We don't just catch kings and coho," he said. "We get a lot of trout, too. Rainbows. Browns. Lakers."

He said the new state record for brown trout was just set here.

"Close in to shore," he laughed. "Guy got it off the pier."

Off Terry Andrae State Park, Captain Gary throttled down to barely steerage way, rigged six rods for trolling, two highlines from the outriggers, two from the downriggers, two on the dippy divers, miniature otter-boards that swung the Andy Reeker spoons far out on each side. There were no rods mounted over the transom, so you fought the fish there, without having to reel in all the lines.

Gary said he preferred only a few people — "two or three" — because they got in more fishing. Otherwise, it was like taking a number in a meat-market and waiting your turn.

My turn came first when the highline flew off the downrigger and Jim handed me the rod. That's what comes of cutting all that wood with Steve Hopkins. It turns you into a team player. I felt that fish in my upper arms, in my shoulders.

It was a rainbow, seven and one-half pounds. Big trout elsewhere. Not here. Gary said a boat brought in a 28-pound king the other day and nobody got up to go down and look.

Outdoors

Then it was Jim's turn. He brought in a coho, and Gary complimented him on the way he handled himself and the fish. Gary talks a lot when a fish is on the line, like a manager talking to his fighter. Or Charlie Lau talking to a hitter.

"Those are *his* fish on the line," Jim Amundson said on the ride home. "He knows them. He finds them. All you have to do is fight them. He's a real pro."

That's how the afternoon went. We took turns catching coho. Catching a few rays. Catching the plaintive appeals from voices on the radio who heard Schrimpf Boat and what exactly was our present position?

We wound up with eight fish "in the box" including Jim's unbelievably strong 15-and-a-half pound king that fought magnificently for a full half-hour.

"Pop a few fish, pop a few tabs," Gary said on the run home. "That's what it's all about."

When we tied up, Jim Amundson noted that for a little craft, Schrimpf Boat sure did draw a pretty big crowd. ■