

River Rats catch river monsters: Grafton hosts third annual catfish contest

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GRAFTON -A 41 pound catfish was the catch of the day at **Grafton's Third Annual River Rat Catfish Classic**.

Tournament director, Rick Eberlin, said the two day event helps fund Grafton's tourism advertising. In fact, 20 percent of the \$100 entry fee goes toward the Grafton

Chamber of Commerce and their efforts to bring people to the village. Eberlin said 35 boats entered this year, which is the most thus far.

"We decided to do what came natural to us," he said. "This town was built on the fishing industry, so hosting a fishing contest just makes sense."

The 41-pound catfish was just one of many large fish caught by contest winners, Pat Muehling of Florissant, Missouri, and Wade Kaminski of St. Charles. Their two-day total was 119.65 pounds. The largest of their fish was so large and full of spirit, it broke the plastic tub in which it was to be weighed. It also cut Muehling a few times after he was struggling to retrieve it from his boat's live well. Muehling said it was not the only time he and Kaminski had come face-to-face with a monster catfish.



"Two or three weeks ago, we caught an 82-pound blue catfish near St. Louis," Muehling said.

To put that into perspective, the record blue catfish caught in Illinois was 79 pounds. It was caught in 1995 in Madison County. One was caught in Missouri, however, weighing more than 120 pounds in 2015.



Muehling released their catch into the water around the marina after weighing them. They took home a bit more than \$900 for winning. Muehling and Kaminski agreed they would return to fish the tournament again.

"We had a real good time," Muehling said. "We'd like to come back again soon. We had a great time at the crayfish boil at Grafton Oyster Bar last night."

Previous to that monster tub-thumper of a catfish, the claim of "catch of the day" was very competitive. Since the tournament began Saturday morning, the largest catfish caught was just above 21 pounds. Early into Sunday's weigh-in, which started at 2 p.m., that record was already broken by Leonard Jacoby of Piasa and his fishing partner, Scott Bryant of Eldred. They brought a catfish weighing in at 23 pounds exactly.

"I thought it was bigger at first, but I'm happy with the 23 pounds," Jacoby said.

Jacoby and Bryant went home with just above \$500 after a final weigh-in of 91.75 pounds.

While they may have taken second, the second largest fish went to the Wolfe family. Matt Wolfe said the 26.55 pound catfish took three people to catch it after it forcefully separated his rod from his reel.

"Our dad had to net it," he said.



The team of brothers Matt and Justin Wolfe and their father, Peter Wolfe took third prize of \$372 with a collective weight of 84.5 pounds.

Eberlin said the big fish of the day award came with a prize of more than \$300.

Besides fishing, the event included refreshments, raffles, a small fishing presentation from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and fried buffalo fish from local fish-fryer Joe Beck.

"He's the best fish-fryer in the area," said event volunteer, Alison Hamburg. "His family was born and raised here, and he knows fish."

Beck himself said the recipe was passed to him by his father who inherited it from his father before him.

"I guess people like it," he said. "We don't have a lot of not-likers come away from here."