

# Showcasing the Six: Bluff City Outdoors

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ALTON – Last Friday, at the Broadway Bash, *The Small Business Revolution* host Amanda Brinkman and season three co-host Ty Pennington, announced the six Alton businesses chosen to split an investment sum of \$500,000 from show's sponsor, the Minneapolis-based Deluxe Corporation.

The six chosen were: Lighthouse Sounds, Lovett's, Today's Beauty Supply, Morrison's Irish Pub, Sham Pooches and Bluff City Outdoors. Bluff City Outdoors is an all-around outdoors shop located in the 2800 block of East Broadway in a building owner Mark McMurray said has been some form of bait and tackle shop since the 1950s. He said he purchased the shop in 2003, and business was good until online competition and the country's economy made things bad.

“We had the best year we ever had in 2009,” McMurray said. “But, the year after was the worst year we ever had. It was right after the stock market crash, and a large online retailer popped up and annihilated our bass fishing demand. We went from bass fishing being 40 percent of our sales to around five percent.”

Previous to that massive blow, McMurray said every year since 2003 before 2010 was getting progressively better. Since 2010, he said things at the shop have “stabilized,” saying the focus was moved from strictly bass fishing. McMurray added equipment for anglers to catch crappie and large catfish alongside a small selection of bow-hunting equipment and trapping supplies.

Those assorted varieties of fish – especially catfish – are leading to another potential growth in Bluff City Outdoors's footprint. McMurray said he wants to expand catfish competitions from Columbia Bottoms along the Missouri River to Alton in the Mississippi River.

“We're doing a catfish tournament out of the Columbia Bottoms this year in April, and I wanted to expand two of them later this year to Alton,” he said. “I wanted to expand the scope of them, and I reached out to the visitors center to help me market it.”

Ultimately, McMurray said he wanted anglers seeking some of the biggest catfish in the world to come to Alton, stay the night, and enjoy trolling its “trophy catfish waters.”

“I was wanting to organize a meeting for people the night before the tournament,” McMurray said. “That way we could expand the scope beyond people wanting to drive an hour to people who can come out the night before, stay in our hotels, stop at our bars and eat at our restaurants.”

As for Alton's trophy waters, McMurray said many people have caught world-record-holding catfish in the Mississippi River near Alton. He said blue-head catfish are

commonly caught near Alton weighing in excess of 100 pounds. Former record holders were caught in the area, but the largest now is from West Virginia with an astounding weigh-in of 143 pounds. McMurray thinks an angler in Alton could beat that, and he sells the tackle to get the job done.

When *The Small Business Revolution* begins filming next week, McMurray said he would like their help with marketing, a specialty of The Deluxe Corporation. He said he will ask with their assistance in creating and marketing these upcoming May and September tournaments as well as his shop in general.

Bluff City Outdoors is a locally and family-owned business. More information on the Catfish on the Confluence story can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/Catfish-on-the-Confluence-299943930444136/>