Chasing February Crappie
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February is an exciting time for crappie fishermen and women. All the shows, new products in stores, and seminars on how to fish different and innovative techniques abound.

Recently, I flew to Wisconsin to attend the National Professional Anglers Association (NPAA) annual conference. Noteworthy speakers from all walks defined and gave examples of professionalism in our sport of angling. Anglers for all species were present. After attending, once I thawed out, I believe this association truly is a good professional organization which hopes to be inclusive and capable of promoting while helping to define our anglers’ professional conduct. I recommend that all fishermen join this association and learn how to become true professionals while building their resumes to be pro staff members, industry representatives, etc.

One of the CrappieNow goals is to help support, define and enhance our sport by showing that crappie fishing is not second place to any other species. It represents families who have a passion for fishing. These families show our children and our grandchildren the joy of fishing. In all future editions, you will see our push to recognize and report on activities supporting families and kids in Fishing. A new section in the zine is “Kids Corner”. NPAA, Future’s Fishing, Take a Kid Fishing, Kids Fishing and Education and many more efforts are teaching families and children the true outdoors fishing experience and our wonderful freedoms. We will share those experiences.

CrappieNow is also working to bring more awareness to legislative issues and efforts which have the potential to hinder our rights to enjoy our National Parks and lakes, and fish our rivers and streams. Please follow us in future editions concerning these major topics and follow us on Facebook.

’Till Next Month
God Bless and Good Fishing,
Dan Dannenmueller, Publisher
How to Choose the “BES”
Ask a few anglers around the country to name their “favorite” crappie-catching color in a jig and you’ll probably end up with almost as many different responses as the number of fishermen questioned. Likely their answers are based on memorable catches with a certain color on a particular lake under specific conditions. Or perhaps they choose the only color crappie jig in their box!

Unlike anglers, crappies don’t have a “favorite” lure color. Scientific research has demonstrated that fish have very good color vision and are able to distinguish differences in colors – even shades of the same color. Certain colors are far more visible under specific water clarity and light conditions than other colors. Therefore color plays a critical role in lure selection along with general shape, size and movement of the jig. How do we know what colors are best to use in a given situation?

There are two general processes to consider. First, the scientific approach utilizes an instrument developed through research that reveals which colors fish can see under certain conditions. The second approach is – for lack of a better term – your gut. This is based on one’s experience over a broad range of lakes of different water clarity. Both work.

Professional crappie angler Dan Dannenmueller, member of Team Crappie Country along with Garrett Steele, is a firm believer in the scientific approach. “I use the Spike It Color-C-Lector. It takes the guess work out the process. By considering water clarity, light intensity and depth, this instrument tells you which colors fish see best under specific conditions.”

The Color-C-Lector was developed by Dr. Loren Hill after years of laboratory and field experiments. It consists of a light meter on the end of a measured cable which is attached to an instrument with color bands arranged in three major groups: Clear, Stained, and Muddy, along with a number scale ranging from 0 to 40. First you determine the water color by lowering the probe into water and noting at what depth white top of the probe disappears. If you lose sight within two feet, water is rated Muddy; two to four feet, water is rated Stained; greater than four feet, water is Clear.

Dannenmueller picks up the process here. “It is extremely important for the angler to have identified the depth at which crappies are holding. You may have determined this by sonar readings of baitfish and crappies, or by having caught fish recently at this depth.”

He explains that after determining the water clarity of the particular lake or river, you once again begin lowering the probe but this time stopping at the depth you believe crappies are located. With the probe at desired depth, turn on the unit. After a few seconds a digital number between 0 and 40 will appear in the window. Next pinpoint that number on the scale, and then move your finger across to the previously determined water clarity column to determine the recommended color or colors. The Color-C-Lector indicates a fluorescent color and a non-fluorescent color in separate color bands opposite each number.
“By using Crappie Pro Mo’Glow fluorescent jig heads and two-tone bodies from Bobby Garland, Garrett and I can easily match the range of colors indicated on the C-Lector. Furthermore, if fish are observed at multiple depths, you can set rods at those depths with each rod fishing a different color combination recommended by the Color-C-Lector.”

Dannenmueller says it is critical to check the recommendations of the Color-C-Lector when available light changes (low sun versus mid-day; sunny skies fading to overcast skies) or when you observe a change in the water color.

“In tournament situations, I always use the Color-D-Lector,” concludes Dannenmueller. “However, if I didn’t have one available, my starting colors would be either something with chartreuse or Bobby Garland Glacier (i.e. white base with hint of bluish tint).”

Dave Lefebre of Erie, Pennsylvania is a professional bass angler on the Bassmaster Elite circuit. But during the offseason he is a diehard crappie angler. Lefebre often remarks that if he was not fishing the pro bass circuit, he would be on the crappie tournament trail.

“Jig color

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in crappie fishing is super important to me,” stresses Lefebre, who has been chasing crappies for almost four decades. “Sure, you can catch some crappies on almost any color, but to maximize your catch you must be tuned into the best color for the conditions. My process of color selection is based around water clarity. Simply by looking at the water and lowering a lure down, I determine if the lake is muddy, dingy, algae stained or clear.

“If the water is in the clear range, I go with more natural colors or clear bodies with sparkle – anything that closely resembles minnows and shad. If the water is muddy or stained, I maximize your catch you must be tuned into the best color for the conditions. My process of color selection is based around water clarity. Simply by looking at the water and lowering a lure down, I determine if the lake is muddy, dingy, algae stained or clear.

Dan Dannenmueller special colors for specific conditions. Here’s proof that small details matter.

Top-10 List
Garland’s Best-Selling Baby Shad Colors:

1. Monkey Milk
2. Glacier
3. Blue Ice
4. Blue Thunder
5. Electric Chicken
6. Cajun Cricket
7. Bluegrass
8. Chartreuse/Red Glitter
9. Lights Out
10. Pearl White

Bobby Garland Crappie Baits manufactures the very popular 2” Baby Shad. “We offer the Baby Shad in 65 colors including Mo’Glo colors,” explains George Toalson, Garland’s lure designer. “Our top two selling colors are Monkey Milk and Glacier. These colors came about based on observation of shad schools while scuba diving. In these baits, I was able to capture the flash that shad put off, which in turn attracts the attention of feeding fish. Anglers tell us that these two colors will catch crappies in a wide variety of waters.”
start with bolder, brighter jig bodies like bright white, oranges, reds or fluorescent colors. Selecting a jig color for green stained water can be tricky, but something with chartreuse is generally a wise choice. If I know crappies are in a location but I’m not getting bites within 5 to 10 minutes, then I change colors.”

When post frontal days create those high blue cloudless skies, crappies can be tight lipped. “Under this situation, I go with translucent hues and clear bodies with sparkle flakes regardless of water color,” explains Lefebre. “For turned-off crappies, I want to present something that barely gives a hint of being a baitfish. Going with bold colors seems to spook them.”

Anytime Lefebre is in search mode – trying to determine exact location of crappies because he has not been on the water for days or is fishing a new lake – he ties on a confidence color. “This will be a cross between a natural color and a bright color, such as a sparkle body with a hot chartreuse tail. My other confidence colors include blue glimmer, white, and daiquiri (mint green).”

By recognizing the part that colors plays in your jig presentation allows you stock up on a wide selection of colored jig bodies right now for the coming season...not just your favorite color!

-Darl Black

Dannenmueller uses a scientific approach for finding the best color. He employs a Color-C-Lector to determine the most visible color under the given light intensity and water color. He then selects a specifically colored jighead and body to match the conditions.

Who needs minnows? Stubby Steve’s Bait lasts all day!
HOW TO CHOOSE THE “BEST” COLOR FOR CRAPPIE JIGS
Josh Gowan, former crappie guide and owner of King Crappie and Prefish Gear, has plenty of fishing and tournament experience. He says, “I’m going with minnows most of the time. I’ll be using minnows when slow trolling and a single jig when one-poling. The older I get the more I see that a straight minnow is hard to beat. It doesn’t matter what the water color may be, the minnow is down there natural and moving. Going very slow is important when minnow fishing to give the crappie time to see and react.”
Panel 3 continues with discussions of formats and a look at wrapped boats. Our series experts include Darrell Van Vactor, General Manager of Crappie USA; Mike Vallentine, President and Owner of Crappie Masters; and Matt Morgan, Co-Owner of the American Crappie Trail. The series also includes quotes from tournament fishermen.

The purpose of the series is to discuss national trails, inside information and the future of the sport. Whether you fish tournaments or not, these national trails and the fishermen who fish them have an impact on the boats, gear and baits that are available. Tournament fishermen have added volumes of fish-catching information that is used in everyday fishing.

One-Pole vs Multiple Pole Tournaments
Darrell Van Vactor with Crappie USA says fishermen might go out and catch more fish on a jig than with minnows, but when restricted to artificial-only tournaments he complains. Most of the fishermen complain. However, he sees a future for these tournaments where a fisherman feels a tap and bump. Feeling the bite is fun.

Crappie Master’s Mike Vallentine says one-pole fishing has been around forever. He believes it’s an art form that has faded because multipole fishing is so popular. The purpose of one-pole tournaments is to break up the monotony of every tournament being the same. Also, for Crappie Masters, they want the Angler Team of the Year to be capable of catching fish in different lakes in different ways. A one-pole tournament is a way of forcing the fishermen to be good at more than one technique.

“Our first one-pole tournament in 2016 was at Tom Bigby. Some fishermen were a little intimidated by the thought of fishing a river system especially with one pole. But some of the teams were catching 100 fish a day down there. Truman and Lake Fork are great fisheries with our Truman event being one of our biggest tournaments of the year.”

Vallentine continues, “Multiple poles, also called spider rigging, catch more fish on most lakes and we are not trying to turn back time. It’s a great technique. But, we enjoy one-pole tournaments and they will be around for a while. Hopefully we will increase the number of them in the future.”

Matt Morgan believes in multiple pole tournaments. “ACT only has multiple pole tournaments but fishermen have the choice of fishing one pole if they want. For example, we know that a summer tournament on Truman will probably be won with one pole even in a multiple-pole tournament. We see no reason to restrict how the anglers fish.”

Tournament fisherman, two-time Crappie Masters Angler Team of the Year
team member, and publisher of CrappieNow Magazine, Dan Dannenmueller, travels with and fishes from a wrapped boat. His primary sponsor is Bobby Garland Crappie Baits. “There is a place for one-pole tournaments. It makes interesting competition using one pole and plastics only. It forces a fisherman to be talented in more than just a trolling method. One-pole purist like them and multipole purist don’t. But there is a place and time for different types of tournaments.”

One-Man Tournament Format
Van Vactor says, “Crappie fishing is a buddy sport. It is different than bass because of the multiple poles and techniques. We’ve considered a draw tournament but it wouldn’t work because each fisherman would have different ideas about how to fish plus there is a problem taking someone to your favorite fishing spots knowing they would return.”

Mike Vallentine says, “It’s been a team thing and that’s just the way it is. I wouldn’t...
mind doing a once-a-year tournament for individuals but it’s been a team concept and I see it staying that way.”

Matt Morgan says, “The team concept has worked because trolling is difficult to do by yourself.”

Dannenmueller says, “I believe there is a place for it but it would take a different mindset because our tournaments have always been built around the team concept. Being different would require some change so most fishermen and trails won’t do it. The positive side would be a much easier path to sponsorships and it would help promote individual fishermen in the sport.”

**Wrapped Boats**

Wrapped boats can be considered as being as close to the professional side of crappie fishing as it gets. A fisherman or team with a wrapped boat has a sponsor who helps with expenses often including tournament fees, travel and products.

Darrell Van Vactor, General Manager of Crappie USA, says, “Wrapped boats haven’t hurt our trails. The main complaint is by local fishermen who feel they are fishing against professional fishermen so that’s not good. But in reality, local fishermen on their home waters do have an advantage. Another thought is that they can’t compete against the big guys so I’ll stay home. The positives of wrapped boats are many. Their main purpose is to get their sponsor’s message out so that makes the teams very important. Their dollars in our tournaments are critical.”

Crappie Masters President, Mike Vallentine, says, “Our wrapped boat program has grown. We are also seeing more wrapped boat teams who are not a part of our program. That means more people are getting help from sponsors allowing them to fish more tournaments and come to our events. One result of all this is seeing more glass boats, high-tech technologies, and the evolution or trend toward boats that are safer.

He says wrapped boats are a positive. They bring more attention to the sport and it creates names people associate with crappie fishing, and the guy is on the road traveling so it brings exposure to the sponsor.

Vallentine says, “One thing I hear is wrapped teams are treated differently but concerning the actual tournament process that isn’t true. They are just another tournament team. What is different is they get to go to more tournaments so they always up their level of fishing and up the overall competition level of the tournaments. Because of their sponsors they may get more media attention but not a tournament advantage.”

Morgan says he hears that wrapped teams are bad because they scare off locals who believe they can’t compete. He says it’s not true but that can be the perception.
“There are many advantages to wrapped teams,” says Morgan. “The first and foremost is the advertising that a sponsor gets. There is an average of 106 impressions a mile for a wrapped team on the highway. Sponsors are paramount for a tournament trail. Also, a wrapped boat means a team is getting help so that allows them to fish more tournaments.”

Dannenmueller says, “For a fisherman there are big positives and negatives. On the negative side, visibility on the water, especially during a tournament, can be bad. Others watch, follow and often crowd.

“I’ve also learned that whether it’s because of jealousy or because some people are just negative when someone has something they don’t, there will be criticism, comments and rumors. I don’t like that but it happens. What most people don’t realize is the time and energy requirements of a fisherman who has a wrapped boat. There are sponsor meetings, boat shows, seminars, working with media, speaking to people who come up and talk just because they see the wrapped boat and want to meet the fisherman or ask questions. At our first Florida tournament this year, we are already scheduled filming something for TV and doing two radio interviews, and we will probably have other work while we are there. It cuts into our time and makes it difficult to focus on prefishing and the tournament. But the bottom line is that the purpose of a wrapped boat is to promote sponsors so time and work is involved.

“The positives are very good. The financial side makes it possible for a fisherman to spend more time on the water and traveling. The positive side of attention off the water is the opportunity to promote the
The Future of Crappie Tournaments

Profile: Mike Vallentine

Age: 43
Home town: Clinton, Mo
Home water: Truman Lake
Other occupations: Convenience store chain for 21 years; promoted mixed martial arts for 3.5 years. Rental houses. Currently the President and Owner of Crappie Masters.

How did you get into crappie fishing? “I played golf for 15 years and got burned out. Love crappie fishing.”

Fishing: “I didn’t win a Crappie Masters but have won several tournaments on Truman.

Big crappie: 3.12 pounds on Truman.

Favorite memory: “A tournament on Truman years back when the wind was blowing 25 mph, beating us to death on the stumps and we caught the biggest stringer of seven crappie that we had seen at that time on the lake. We caught the 14.5 to 15 inch fish for two hours. That just doesn’t happen at Truman.”

Favorite lake? “St. Johns River. It’s clear water with a black stain. It’s the only place I’ve fished where you can catch crappie while watching an alligator and have a manatee swim by the boat all at the same time. It’s very different and has excellent black crappies.”

Fishing heroes? “No heroes but there are a lot of fishermen I respect. For example, Kevin and Charlie Rogers have an absolute passion and energy for crappie fishing. Those are the type fishermen I respect most.”

Pet Peeve? “People who make assumptions without knowledge about something or somebody. We all have good in us so I like to see everyone get a fair chance.”

Hobbies? “Not much time for hobbies but I do like deer hunting.”

Boat food? “I always have packages of crackers with me.”

Favorite sports teams: “I’m loyal to KC Chiefs, Royals and Missouri Tigers.

Something people don’t know about you? “I’m very competitive. I don’t show it on the outside but I have a burning desire to compete.”

Sponsor, the sport of fishing, tournaments, and the fisherman personally. The boat is seen as being a measure of success and professionalism. It offers opportunities to speak to fishermen, teach them about fishing and products. The tournaments benefit is more dollars and it brings a group of fishermen to many of the tournaments every year. So the wrapped boats are tools that can be beneficial for both the fishermen and tournaments.”

The Future of Crappie Tournaments continues next month with Part 4 including a personal profile on our last tournament circuit owner/manager, Matt Morgan. Topics to come include magazine, TV and social media; how local and regional clubs influence national tournament circuits; sportsmanship; polygraphs; care of fish including releasing; winning the Classic and Angler of the Year; the changing look of tournaments; and the future of crappie tournaments.

Next month: Part 3 will continue our series with more on tournament format options with input from seasoned tournament fishermen. Also, a profile on Crappie Master’s Mike Vallentine.

- Tim Huffman

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Charlie Brewer’s Slider Company was started in 1970 after a lifetime of fishing experience by Charlie Brewer, Sr. This experience and desire to improve sport fishing led to the development of the Slider technique. Slider fishing is a simple do-nothing method for imitating nature. Slider fishing offers a fun and relaxing way to increase your catch. Light tackle is the approach used to fish Slider products. The Slider technique has been proven to be productive throughout the United States, Canada, Japan, Korea and in many other countries in all types of water and on many species of fish. Our hope is the products shown in this catalog will make the sport of fishing fun and productive for you. Please contact us for any assistance.
GOOD FISHING!

Charlie Brewer, Sr. - 1990’s
- WWII Navy Veteran -

Charlie Brewer, Jr.
- Vietnam Navy Veteran -

- Do-Nothing - Finesse - Polishing The Rocks - Don’t Over Play Nature -

CAROLINA’S CRAPPIE CLASSIC

Winners for 2016

Stokes McClellan and Jordan Newsome

Used 2-1/8” Slider Minnow and 3” Slider Grub
Because it was minus two when I awoke one February morning, I decided not to go ice fishing as planned.

Minus two, I reasoned, might damage my truck’s engine block and my block as well, so I made a cup of tea, read the newspaper and pondered the situation.

The weather man said it would be plus 20 by 2 p.m. with little or no wind. And since it was late in the month, it would still be light until after six. In my estimation both my truck and I could handle those conditions.

After choring around the house most of the day, I finally got going around 2, arrived on the ice a half-hour later and by three had a bunch of Swiss holes in the cheese.

Early on the bluegills were hitting okay, then around four a few trout got active and soon after the crappie really started hitting. I had a great hour or so of ice fishing for crappie until I pulled up stakes with only a pale glow of orange light left in the sky.

That year the thermometer registered zero or less so many times when I woke I didn’t feel like going out, however I did this late-afternoon thing a number of times and it was fine.

Happily this delayed daytime ice fishing goes hand in hand with the late-ice season. Depending where you are fishing, the timing can vary by several weeks. But there is a constant, and that’s the attitude of the crappie.

Depending on winter’s grip -- firm or relaxing -- crappie are moving to the shallows at this time. Basically they’re heading to where they’ll eventually spawn. But crappie just don’t pack their

I may get fewer crappie from tip-ups and shiners but those I do catch are likely to be hefty.
CRAPPIE RISE LATE ON LATE ICE

bags and stay in the shallows – it’s still too cold for that. They move back and forth over the course of a day whenever the spirit inspires them, and they’ll certainly depart from the shallows when things don’t suit. Even under the ice it’s a fluid situation.

But whenever crappie do travel to shallow water they are hungry. No bones about it. Find them in this situation and 99 times out of 100 they’re going to eat.

That’s why my number one tactic during the late-afternoon season is to check out and fish shallow water.

On some lakes with extensive weed beds, the shallows can be water as little as three feet deep. On other waters shallow-staging crappie are in four-to-seven feet. Elsewhere the shallow sections are the submerged points off banks and entrances to bays and coves. Depths there are six to twelve feet. It seems each lake has its own set of rules, but the constant is that late in the day crappie are moving up.

When setting out for late crappie, it’s important to have a feel for the lake you’re fishing. Lakes with very large areas of shallow water that hold winter weeds will probably see the best crappie bite. Lakes lined more with deep drop-off banks and not much shallow water will most likely have the poorest bite. Also it is much easier to target extensive shallow flats where you know crappie will eventually go.
to spawn rather than to try and find crappie over an extensively large basin with, percentage-wise, very little water under five or six feet deep. But if the lake is mammoth with mammoth shallow flats as well, this is a place to pay attention to. The moral is pick your late-ice season lake wisely.

As for technique, late-rising crappie might require one adjustment that early or mid-ice season didn’t demand. Often the shallowing crappie are accompanied by yellow perch. If the perch are a nice size that’s a good thing and you fish for both at the same time. But it often seems that the first yellow perch to move into the shallows are small finger-size perch. These fish have a way of ganging up on small baits. If you’re having one of those days that you’re saying, “I can’t get the bait through all these pesky perch” then try making an adjustment to larger baits.

Most of the ice year I’m fishing crappie with 1/100, 1/64 and 1/32 ounce jigs and trailers but when finger perch or small bluegills are around I bump my jigs through the 1/16, 3/32, 1/8 ounce range. Also the spoons I like for crappie go from 1 and 1 1/2-inch models to 2 and 2 1/2 inch models. And when using tip-ups, I switch out the shorter fathead minnows for 2 1/2-inch shiners. I’ll probably never figure out that if by using larger lure size I’m just avoiding the strikes of the smaller perch or whether I’m actually copying the perch size crappie may be taking. Cleaning some crappie I’ve sometimes found perch in their gullets other times it’s the typical larva crappie eat so it could go either way.

On another note I know I’m going to get fewer crappie from the tip-ups Staying into the night can produce some excellent crappie fishing at this time.
and shiners but those I do catch are likely to be in the 14-to-15 inch range.

Unlike the deep-basin crappie of mid-winter, shallow crappie are there to eat. Sure they have turn-off times but more often when you’re not catching fish it’s because they’re circulating. You have two choices when this happens, either drill more holes and go look for them or sit it out where you are and wait for them to come back. Often I’m impatient (or just too cold) so I chase them with my Vexilar.

How to attract these shallow late-day crappie to your chosen bait really isn’t hard. For lure action I like to impart tiny little waves on my rod tip, lightly bouncing the tip continually, or bouncing it and pausing. At this stage of the game, really exaggerated rod and jigging motions are not necessary. Then again, dead sticking a jig or spoon,

TOP TEN CONSIDERATIONS FOR LATE AFTERNOON & LATE SEASON ICE CRAPPIE

1- In February crappie are basically heading in fits and spurts to where they’ll eventually spawn.
2- Crappie move back and forth over the course of a day whenever the spirit moves them.
3- Whenever crappie travel to shallow water they are definitely hungry.
4- The number one tactic during late-afternoon is to check out and fish shallow water.
5- When setting out for crappie, it’s important to have a feel for the lake you’re fishing.
6- Lakes with large areas of shallow water that hold winter weeds will probably see the best late-season crappie bite.
7- It is much easier to target extensive shallow flats where you know crappie will eventually go to spawn rather than to try and find crappie over an extensively large basin with deep water.
8- Most of the ice year I’m fishing crappie with 1/100, 1/64 and 1/32 ounce jigs and trailers but when fishing the late season in late afternoon I bump my jigs into the 1/16, 3/32, 1/8 ounce range.
9- In the late season the spoons I like for crappie go from 1 and 1 1/2-inch models to 2 and 2 1/2 inch models.
10- When using tip-ups for crappie, I switch out the shorter fathead minnows for 2 1/2-inch shiners.
CRAPPIE RISE LATE ON LATE ICE

- By Vic Attardo

even with larva bait, may not produce as many as a lure doing the wave.

All sorts of colors are viable for late-ice crappie but after years of playing this game I’ve figured something out. The better flats are soft-bottomed and so the water at bottom level might be a tad murky. It looks clean on the surface but when you view it with a camera it’s full of silt and slightly stained. For this reason I like high-contrast colors, pink and white, chartreuse and lime, black and white, and for spoons gold and some hot color such as fluorescent red or yellow.

Another good producer are the minnow-shaped ice jigs with hooks at the head, tail and bottom. Add a bite of perch belly or a perch head to these odd lures and you have a real winner for shallow later-afternoon crappie. Don’t worry that the addition ruins the balance of the lure; it doesn’t matter.

When it comes down to it, I’m enjoying a nice morning in a warm house and a few hours of better fishing in a warmer afternoon. You may not think that 20 to 30 degrees is warm, but for an ice fisherman, 20 is exactly that.

- By Vic Attardo
Caroline Brewer-Calton has joined Slider full-time in the position of assistant vice-president. Caroline will assume responsibility for Slider’s marketing, trade shows, website, office management and handle day-to-day operations. She is no stranger to production. “During high school I worked for Slider making fishing rods. Papa Charlie (Charlie Brewer, Sr.) use to give me tips on how to get the guides lined up just right and how to check the blanks before wrapping. This still ranks as my favorite job.”

She earned a B.S. Degree in Early Childhood Education and a Masters Degree in Administration and Supervision. Her formal experience includes 18 years in public education. She was also administrator of the public school system Pre-K program managing a 1.2 million dollar grant and budget. This position included communicating and dealing with the public, setting financial goals, analyzed data and developed programs of improvement, supervision of a team of teachers and assistants and coordinated with state and local leaders.

Slider President, Charlie Brewer, Jr., commented, “We are happy to have Caroline with us now full-time. She has been a member of the Slider family since high school and is no stranger to our products and operations.”
Go Fishing With The B’n’M Pros.

Sam Heaton’s 7-Foot Super-Sensitive
The SHSS72n is a spinning rod with the same sensitivity and feel of the jig pole series. Improvements include Dyna-Flo guides for smooth line retrieval and a cork knob handle for outstanding balance and feel. Historically one of the most popular rods on the water, the SHSS72n is still supple, strong and sensitive.

Whitey Outlaw DOUBLE DUTY
Get back to “Fishing The Basics” with Whitey Outlaw. This Medium-Action rod is for big heavy hybrid bream, monster shellcrackers & any size crappie. It’s perfectly balanced with a comfortable foam handle for all-day fishing - no reel needed. It features a tough & lightweight Graphite Blank, and one tip eyelet, with one reinforced Tie Down Guide.

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Not everyone will use an example of elephants in the same paragraph as crappie, but TTI-Blakemore’s Marketing guru TJ Stallings, always has a way with words. He also has experience on the water and enjoys fishing the Alabama River near his home.

“Elephants like peanuts so it’s no surprise that crappie like small jigs so most of the time they are ideal. However, coming up on pre-spawn and spawn, a big crappie has a lot of mouth and can bury a big bait. A biological theory is that fish go after the most protein with the least amount of energy. A bass fishermen will quickly tell you that they can catch an 8-inch fish on a 10-inch worm. Therefore, crappie will take a small bait but a big bait, like the new 1/4-ounce Scarlis head with a 4/0 hook, is sometimes excellent for catching big crappie. –TJ Stallings

2017 Tentative Schedule

January 27, 28 St. John’s River, Deland, FL

February 3, 4 Lake Talquin, Gadsden County, FL

February 24, 25 Lake D’Arbonne, Farmerville, LA

March 3, 4 Lake Greenwood, Greenwood, SC

March 11 Lakes Washington, Whittington, Lee, Ferguson, Paradise, Greenville, MS

March 24, 25 Grenada Lake, Grenada, MS

April 8 Lake Fork, Emory, TX

April 15 Lake of the Ozarks, Sunrise Beach, MO

April 22 Lake Eufaula, Eufaula, OK
When Joe Bragg calls crappie fishing a lifesaver, he isn’t exaggerating.

After returning from two tours of duty in Iraq with the Army several years ago, his life hit rock bottom. His wife left him, he lost his house, he couldn’t find a job and the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder were taking its toll.

“I was ready to check out. I was thinking suicide,” said Bragg, 37, who lives in Topeka, Kansas. “It was such a hard adjustment, coming back from the war. You don’t realize how much you change. “I just couldn’t see any hope.”

Bragg served in the Army from October 2006 to July 2013 and put in two one-year tours of duty on an Army scout team in Baghdad. Serving in a war can be tough on a man, he’ll tell you. He witnessed horrors that he wouldn’t wish on anyone.

He survived mortar fire 17 times (yes, he remembers the exact number) and lived with the pain of losing three friends to suicide.

But Bragg found hope in the most unlikely of situations. On some of many sleepless nights, he tried to get his mind off his recent past by staying up and tying crappies jigs.

He drew on the experience of watching his father, who tied jigs while they lived in Florida. So he went to the big-box outdoors stores and bought an assortment of feathers, chenille and Flashabou in bright colors and went to work.

Soon, he was casting his hand-tied lures into the murky waters of Kansas reservoirs and catching big crappies. He didn’t think much about his homemade lures until he started giving some of the feather jigs to friends and finding that they too, found success with the baits. As his jigs became in demand, he started charging for them. And suddenly, he had a reason for living.

“I started tying jigs so that I didn’t have to sit somewhere begging for money,” Bragg said. “It was that bad. “I was a master carpenter before I went into the service, but after you’ve been in the Army, your body gets banged up. The mind’s willing, but the body just can’t handle a lot of things.”

Yet, his life is much better now, thanks to the therapy of crappie fishing. He started a business in 2015 and began selling his jigs to fishermen across the country. He did business the old-fashioned ways, hand-tying each jig and taking custom orders.

Purple, white and chartreuse? No problem. Bragg tied them up and usually had them in the mail to the customer in 36 hours.

But it wasn’t too long before Bragg had to back off. He tried hiring other Army vets to help him tie his jigs, but he still couldn’t keep up with demand.

Today, he still ties jigs and sells them to friends. And he often ties a fresh batch the night before he plans to hit one of his favorite lakes in Kansas.

“When I go fishing, I have a tackle box and a hackle box,” he said. “I’ll tie jigs anywhere.”

“Purple, black and pink,” he said,
displaying a package of jigs that he tied before a late-December trip. “That’s what I have been catching them on, so I wanted to make sure we didn’t run out.”

A few minutes later, his boat was plowing through whitecaps on Hillsdale Lake, a 9,045-acre reservoir near Kansas City, headed to a spot he had located on a contour map the night before.

“In the winter, I like to fish the bends in a river or creek channel,” he said. “You find a good brush pile along that channel bend and a lot of times that’s where the crappies will be.”

Once Bragg turned on his electronics, the advanced sonar unit etched a pretty picture. There was brush 17 feet below the boat, and plenty of fish activity there, too.

Bragg dropped one of his homemade jigs into the water and watched as it descended on his sonar screen. He stopped it just above the brush and held it steady.

Seconds later, he watched as a mark on the screen streaked up to the jig, and he braced for a strike.

“This is like playing a video game,” he said. “You can watch a crappie come right up to your jig. Sometimes, they’ll just look and turn away. But a lot of times they’ll hit.”

This one hit. Bragg set the hook, and lifted a big crappie into the boat with his 10-foot jigging pole.

Once he had unhooked the crappie, he placed it on a measuring board. “Thirteen
and a half inches,” he said. “That’s what we’re looking for.”

That fish was the first of many keepers. Several hours later, Bragg and I had both caught our limit of 20 crappies and Bragg was again extolling the fun of Kansas crappie fishing.

“The thing I love about crappie fishing is that you get a lot of action and you can eat what you catch,” he said. “You keep a bass to eat and you’ll get crucified.

“But it’s not that way with crappies.” Today, crappie fishing is Bragg’s life. He stays busy running the Kansas Crappie Club, which he founded in October of 2015.

At first, it was just a friends’ group on Facebook, a way to exchange fishing reports and get together for small tournaments. But it has grown to so much more.

Today, the Kansas Crappie Club has 1,025 members and a small percentage of members get together for tournaments each month. Bragg earmarks a charity for each of the events he puts on, not even taking a cent for himself.

Last year, his tournaments benefitted Toys for Tots, Heroes on the Water, the Beverly Woods Fishing and Hunting with Kids Foundation and local chapters of Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation. He also holds a tournament on Veterans Day to benefit a Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism program to buy fishing and hunting licenses for disabled veterans.

“Joe is the most generous man I know,” said Phil Taunton of Emporia, Kansas, who

Joe Bragg ties the size and colors of jigs that are the “hot bite” for the lake he is fishing.
hosts a weekly radio show on the outdoors and is active in many programs to promote kids getting involved in the outdoors. “He doesn’t have much himself, but he is always willing to work hard for others.”

When Bragg isn’t organizing a tournament or tying jigs, he often is on the water. He is a die-hard, fishing reservoirs and small state fishing lakes from the heat of summer to the bitter cold of winter.

It’s all about the chase, and Bragg greets every day with enthusiasm.

“He definitely is motivated,” said Frank Haidusek, a nationally ranked crappie fisherman from Manhattan, Kansas. “He wants to learn all he can about crappie fishing, and he’s getting better all the time.”

Bragg dreams of one day becoming a guide and competing on the national circuit. Until then, though, he is happy where life’s path has brought him.

“Years ago, I never would have dreamed I would be doing what I am now,” Bragg said. “I’m happy when I’m fishing.”

“I try to help other veterans who are having a tough time like I did. I tell them it’s a temporary identity crisis. Life can get better.”

- By Brent Frazee

Joe’s Way
Joe Bragg has become a year-round crappie fisherman in Kansas. As long as there is open water, he’ll be out there. Here are some of the ways he catches crappies.

• You’ll seldom see Bragg casting for crappies. He almost always is fishing vertically, usually in 14 to 18 feet of water in brush.
• One of his favorite times of the year to fish for Kansas crappies is in the cold of winter. The fish often gather in brush along river and creek channels and can readily be caught. Bragg likes to fish with 8- to 10-pound Power Pro braided line and one-quarter-ounce feather jigs that he hand-ties. Those jigs can be as much as 3 inches long, but the crappies will pound them, he said.
• Bragg relies on high-definition Humminbird sonar units to pick up fish in the brush. He can watch his jig descend and can even spot crappies rise out of the brush to take a look at his offering. He uses a MotorGuide Xi5 wireless trolling motor that operates with a hand-held remote and a GPS module that he can program to act as an electronic anchor, holding him one spot.
• Unlike many crappie fishermen, Bragg doesn’t like fishing the spawn. The fish can be concentrated in the shallows during that time, and large catches are possible. But there are too many variables that can cause the crappies to suddenly “turn off.” “During the spawn, one cold front can change everything,” he said. “They can be up on the banks one day, then everything changes. It’s too unpredictable.”
• During the summer months, he uses several methods to catch crappies. He often uses a drop-shot rig to lower minnows into the heart of the brush. He also spider rigs, putting out several long rods and minnows to present multiple baits. And when the daytime heat becomes oppressive, he will fish at night under the glow of lanterns or floating lights. The light sets up a food chain, attracting the bugs, then the minnows or shad, then a layer of crappies underneath them.
Boiled Crappie Snacks

Vernon Summerlin

Boils and bakes are traditionally associated with coastal regions of the United States. Scandinavian immigrants get credit for bringing the fish boil to the Midwest (far from saltwater coastal areas and shellfish). They prepared locally caught for a quick and economical way to feed large groups of people.

The fish is typically cut into small chunks and cooked in boiling water with red potatoes. Some boilers add onions. Salt is the only seasoning used, to raise the specific gravity of the water. Up to one pound of salt is added to two gallons of water.

The cooking of the fish can be an elaborate “show-off” presentation to add flare to the simple dish. The fish and potatoes are prepared in a cast-iron kettle.

When the water comes to a boil, the potatoes in a wire basket are lowered into the kettle. The fish are then placed in another wire basket and lowered in. After about 10 minutes when the fish are cooked, the oils rise to the top of the pot. The boiler then tosses a small amount of kerosene on the flames and the increase in flames causes a boil-over. The fish oils spill over the side of the pot and the fish is done. The fish chunks remain whole and firm. Boilers usually drip melted butter over the fish before serving. Although not part of the traditional recipe, tartar sauce and lemon slices are also served with the fish.

**Boiled Crappie Snacks**

- 2 fillets (or more) per person
- Water
- Dash of salt or use a seafood boil – Zatarain’s* or Old Bay.

Cut fillets into 1-inch cubes and put into boiling water for about 1.5 minutes. A seafood boil will add more flavors. Serve hot or chill before serving.

* Zatarain means “fishing hole” in a Spanish Basque dialect.

**Boiled Crappie Sauce**

- 4 parts ketchup
- 1 part horse radish
- Squirt of lemon or lime juice to taste.

Mix ingredients well and chill. Impale crappie chunks with toothpicks for dipping. Also serve with dipping chips if desired. Easy and fast to prepare for watching ball games and TV fishing shows.

**Poached Crappie Fillets**

- 2 crappie fillets per person
- Water

In a pan, pour just enough liquid to cover fish. Cover the pan tightly and cook fillets just below the boiling point. Cook fillets 8 to 10 minutes. The poaching liquid may be used as the base for a sauce.

Make sauce as above or serve with cocktail sauce.
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Tournament Results

**CRAPPIENUTZ**

**JANUARY 14th**

1. Tim Fowler/Steve Hart 8.74
2. Jock Savage/Antonio Tolbert 8.26
3. Randy Willis/Paul Taylor 6.99

**BIG FISH**

1. Tim Fowler/Steve Hart 1.57

**TOP YOUTH**

1. Caden Mciver

**TOP FEMALE**

Merilee Templeton

**CHATTANOOGA CRAPPIE CLUB**

**JANUARY 15th**

1. Mike Johnson/Brian Howard 8.42
2. Dee Reeves 7.63
3. Tommy Whitt/Justin Ross 7.08

**BIG FISH**

1. Greg Henry/Trey Evans 1.69
Check out the NEW 2" Crappie DAPPER!

Pink Ghost
Chart. Pepper Shad
Slammin' Chicken

Monkey Milk
Popsicle
Grey Ghost

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the Best Crappie Tackle
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Single vs. Double Minnow Rigs

Single Minnow Rig Versus Double Minnow Rig
with Darrell Baker

“I prefer to fish a single-minnow rig when I'm slow trolling on river ledges in the fall and winter months,” Darrell Baker says. “I like a single-hook minnow rig, because I don’t get hung-up as much as I do when I'm fishing a double-hook minnow rig. Because I don’t get hung-up as much, I believe I catch more crappie than I do with a double-minnow rig. If I'm fishing rocks or the brush not as dense as I usually find on the main river ledges, then I will fish a double-minnow rig. Also if I'm fishing for suspended crappie in the middle of a creek, then I may use a double-minnow rig.”

To contact Baker, go to his website at www.weisslakecrappieguides.com, cell phone at 256-557-0129, or his email Darrell@weisslakeguides.com.

To learn more about how to fish for crappie click here: http://johninthewild.com/books/#crappie.
1st Place

Billy Hines - Lake Arthur - Butler, PA
Black Crappie: 15 Inches - 2.25 Lbs
White Crappie: 16 Inches - 2.75 Lbs

Caught through the ice using an ice jig tipped with maggot.
Don’t forget to send in your recent photo by the 15th.

Crappie NOW e-magazine accepts color digital images for publication. A single photo will be selected after the 10th of each month for the next month’s edition. The winner will be contacted via email with prize information.

Check out www.crappienow.com for more details.
“I need a GPS to find my tackle box!”

© 2012 Jonny Hawkins
CAST for Kids is an organization geared to expose children, who may not otherwise get the opportunity, to the sport of fishing and the enjoyment of the outdoors. They strive to increase the awareness of all participants, parents, sportsmen, and volunteers, to the capabilities of children with disabilities, in effect strengthening local communities. The following is note from executive director, Jay Yelas.

The 2016 season has drawn to a close, with our final event of the year taking place last weekend in Louisiana. It has been a truly memorable 25th Anniversary season. The C.A.S.T. for Kids Foundation is growing, and we held a record number of events across America in 2016. The C.A.S.T. for Kids Program added 16 brand new events this year. We held new events in Alabama, Oklahoma, Virginia, Missouri, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, California, Wisconsin, and 5 new events in Texas. Stop for a minute and consider all the joy those new events brought to the children who might not have otherwise had the chance to go fishing or boating this year. I would like to say a very special “thank you” to all the volunteers who make C.A.S.T. for Kids events a reality!

Our hope is that these new events will continue annually and become a rich tradition in their respective communities. There are several long-standing C.A.S.T. for Kids events around the Country that have been taking place annually for up to 25 consecutive years! Thank you to all the coordinators and volunteers who have served the kids in their communities so well for so long!

Starting new C.A.S.T. for Kids events all over America is in keeping with our vision of doubling our number of events by the year 2018. We want to keep spreading the joy of fishing, and are working now to put together several more new events for 2017. If you or anyone you know is interested in starting a new event in your area, please contact C.A.S.T. Western Program Director Jim Behnken or C.A.S.T. Eastern program Director Jeff Barnes. Keep an eye on our Calendar Page for upcoming events near you.

Learn more and how you can help at www.castforkids.com
The Weiss Lake Improvement Association will be holding its Annual Crappie Rodeo (Tagged Fish) Tournament Feb 15 - April 30, 2017. Over $100,000 in cash prizes. Our local high school anglers are helping WLIA with fish habitat in Weiss Lake.

Schedule of Events

Logan Martin, AL 02/18/17
Eufaula, AL 02/25/17
Neely-Henry, AL 03/03-04/17
Lake of Egypt, IL 03/10-11/17
Weiss Lake, AL 03/18/17
Ky & Barkley Lakes, TN 03/24-25/17
Cave Run Lake, KY 04/01/17
Lake Wylie, NC 04/01/17
Lake Cumberland, KY 04/07-08/17
Old Hickory Lake, TN 04/15/17
Green River Lake, KY 04/21-22/17
Grand Lk St. Marys, OH 04/28-29/17
Mississinewa/Salamonie, IN 05/06/17
Lake Shelbyville, IL 05/13/17
Patoka Lake, IN 05/20/17

2017 Crappie USA Classic
Ky & Barkley Lakes, Paris, TN - 10/26-28/17
Good -bye until next month.

Vic Attardo photo