



Going Fishin'

BY ELIZABETH LESTER

PHOTOS BY GEORGE HORSFORD & MARIANNE LOBAUGH
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It is widely known across the Sunshine State that if an individual resides near a pond, lake or river, the old rod and reel comes into play. That's because Florida is one of the few states that is conducive to year-round fishing.

Luckily, Villages residents have not been deprived of this fun sport, and according to Dan Clancy, the president of the Freshwater Fishing Club, fishing is an up-and-coming activity in Florida's Friendliest Hometown. More people are discovering this each year.

"I have been here two years," Dan said of his club membership. "To my understanding, the beginning number of club members was 35. That was seven years ago."

*Club members Sue Waller,
Vic Nelson and Wayne
Barksdale share a joke while
fishing at Lake Santiago.*

Today, the Freshwater Fishing Club has about 300 members.

Dan says that although he doesn't fish in The Villages often, a group of the club's members enjoy fishing close to home.

"Some of the other members fish in Lake Mira Mesa at Paradise," Dan said. "And there are probably eight or nine lakes in The Villages that they use."

In addition to the waterways in The Villages, there are many places to fish in the area.

"Within 50 miles of The Villages, there are hundreds of lakes," Wayne Barksdale, who lives in the Village of Poinciana, said. "The Ocala National Forest is a beautiful location, and there's the Harris chain of lakes. There's more water here than you could fish in a lifetime."





Freshwater Fishing Club members cast their lines at Lake Santiago. For more information about the Freshwater Fishing Club of The Villages, call Dan Clancy at (352) 430-0211.

If bass is your preferred quarry, take note. According to Wayne, "Central Florida is the bass capital of the United States."

Fellow Freshwater Fishing Club member Jerry Echols points out that although most members of the club are experienced fishermen, there is still plenty of room for those who want to learn the sport.

"The part that we like to contribute (to the community) is the club's participation in teaching people how to fish in Florida," Jerry said.

Jerry then explained the process that a new fisherman goes through upon joining the club.

"Usually somebody in the club who owns a boat will take them out with them," Jerry said.

Conservation is important to the Freshwater Fishing Club. "The group promotes catch and release," said Wayne. "It's called CPR — catch, photograph, and release. Kissing the fish is optional."

Both Dan, an Indiana native and a resident of the Village of Tall Trees, and Jerry, who is from Ohio and now lives in the Village of Saddlebrook, agree that fishing in and around The Villages differs greatly from the fishing in other areas in which they have lived.

"It is extremely different," Jerry said. "The lakes here are all shallow-water lakes and you have to learn the pattern of the bass and the times they spawn."

Dan said that the weather is the part of fishing in The Villages that is most different from his old Hoosier hometown.

"We just don't have any cold spells here," Dan said.

The Villages recreation centers have been a great asset to avid fishermen, says John Rohan, assistant district administrator of The Villages.

"We have a rod loaner program at La Hacienda Center," John said. "And we have implemented a fish stocking program at Lake Mira Mar."

The rod loaner program at La Hacienda Recreation Center is a "free-rental" system where, upon request, rods and reels that have been donated by the Freshwater Fishing Club can provide guests or occasional fishermen the materials they need for a fun-filled sportsman's outing.

"We provide the rods and the reels for the grandkids when they come down," Dan said of his club. "It's free and we also maintain them and keep a new line on them and upgrade."



Dan Clancy checks rods at La Hacienda for the loaning program.



Members of the Freshwater Fishing Club watch on the banks of Lake Mira Mar as Freddy Langford, of Langford Aquatics, releases 150 largemouth bass into the water.

Future Growth

For some who may be worried that The Villages needs more bountiful lakes, good news is coming. Some lakes that are still in the developmental stages are being stocked with plenty of fish for future baiters.

Villages anglers won't have far to go to find bass. Lake Mira Mar was restocked with the sport fish June 8. The Freshwater Fishing Club donated \$1,000 toward the restocking program.

"In November, we restocked the shad, shiners and bluegill the bass feed on," said Debbie Hurtt, regional recreation director for La Hacienda Recreation Center. "We've been working with Freddy Langford, a fisheries biologist, to do an assessment of our ponds."

Freddy, a fisheries biologist and owner of Langford Aquatics in Lakeland, said that he and The Villages are working together on stocking a few lakes to test the environment.

"We are kind of working on a test project or two to see what it would take to develop a project (of that size)," Freddy said. "We are getting the food chain started and we are trying to develop recreational, or sport, fishing."

Freddy went on to describe what goes into filling a lake with a fisherman's dream prize, the largemouth bass.

"To have largemouth bass in place you have to make sure that the species that they feed on are there," Freddy said. "The ones such as shiners and shad and bluegill sunfish, those are on the lower end (of the food chain), and they have to be there."

That restocking has been successful. John O'Brien, a member of the Freshwater Fishing Club, peered into the shallows of Lake Mira Mar and was pleased with what he saw.

"See all those little depressions? That's where the feeder fish were spawning. That's a good sign that the feeder fish are good and healthy."

Looking out again, John, who lives in the Village of Country Club Hills, saw a number of sunfish and minnows swimming along the shore.

"The bass will think they have gone to the Golden Corral," John said.

More information, including a pond map of The Villages' fishing-friendly waters, is available at <http://www.districtgov.org/vccdd/recreation/fishing.asp>, or call the Sumter Landing Community Development District at (352) 751-6700, and/or the Village Center Community Development District at (352) 753-4508.



Jerry Echols enjoys a solitary moment of fishing at Lake Mira Mar.

Villages Fishing Guidelines



All residents will be required to comply with federal, state and local laws, statutes and ordinances while fishing within the boundaries of The Villages. (Licenses are required for fishers 16 or older. No license is required for those over 65 with proof of age.)



Residents may fish in any lake, canal or stream, whether natural or man-made, which can be reached without crossing over or trespassing upon any privately owned property.



Residents may not fish in Lake Sumter or other areas with “No Fishing” signs posted.



Nature preserves and jurisdictional wetlands may be fished in accordance with item 2 shown above, provided that only artificial baits, hooks, lines, sinkers and bobbers/corks are allowed inside the boundaries of any wetlands. Any person crossing into jurisdictional wetlands is in violation of state and federal law and may be prosecuted.

Anyone having any questions regarding this policy may call the Village Center Community Development District at 753-4508 or the Sumter Landing Community Development District at 751-6700.

Fishing Spots In The Villages*

Lakes in The Villages that are available to fish from shore and are known to have bass or other fish in them:



Lake La Paquito – Located west of the traffic circle at Morse Boulevard and Camino del Rey.



Paradise Lake – On the historic side located at the east end of the golf cart bridge. Large parking lot off Paradise Boulevard.



Lake Mira Mar – Adjacent to La Hacienda Recreation Center on Rainbow Boulevard. Lots of available parking and eager fish to catch and release.



Silver Lake – On the historic side behind the Silver Lake Recreation Center. Car parking is available at the recreation center.



Lake Santiago – On Enrique Boulevard near Chaparral, next to El Santiago Recreation Center. Limited off-road parking is available on Enrique Drive between Chaparral and Carolina Court.

**List from the Freshwater Fishing Club Web site at www.freshwaterfishingclub.com*

Getting Licensed

Fishing licenses are available from your local tax collector; also, many bait and tackle shops offer the license for a small additional fee. “Instant” licenses are available by calling (888) 347-4356 or registering online at www1.wildlifelicense.com. Additional fees apply for instant licenses.

Normal license fees are \$13.50 for a 12-month resident license. Nonresidents may purchase a seven-day license for \$16.50 or a 12-month license for \$31.50. For complete information, go to floridafisheries.com/license.html.