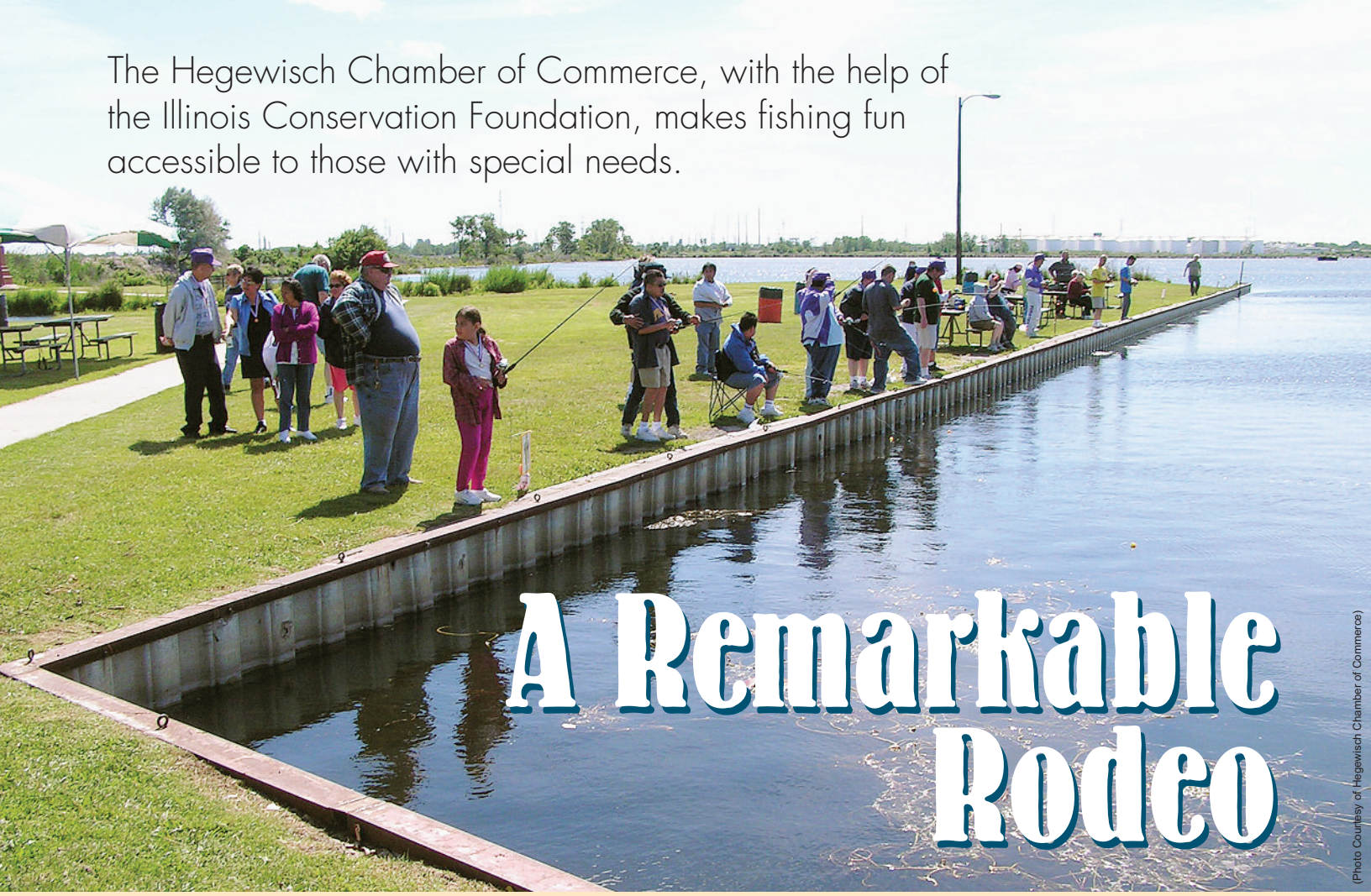
The Hegewisch Chamber of Commerce, with the help of the Illinois Conservation Foundation, makes fishing fun accessible to those with special needs.



# A Remarkable Rodeo

(Photo Courtesy of Hegewisch Chamber of Commerce)

Story by Elizabeth Eberlin

The Chicagoland fishing rodeo is unique in many respects. You don't need to bring a rod and reel. You don't need tackle or bait. You don't even need to be able to cast a line or drag that trophy fish from the lake. All participants need is a desire to spend a day at William W. Powers State Conservation Area and a fondness for America's favorite outdoor activity.

The rodeo, held by the Hegewisch Chamber of Commerce at William W. Powers State Conservation Area's Wolf Lake, is open to all ages of people with special needs. Participants spend the day fishing at Wolf Lake and are provided with equipment, lunch and help from volunteers when needed.

For further information on the Chicagoland Fishing Rodeo, or to volunteer, contact Saki Villalobos at William W. Powers State Recreation Area at (773) 646-3270.

"The participants are so happy they don't even want to leave at the end of the day," said Saki Villalobos, site superintendent of the conservation area.

And with good reason. This remarkable program provides not only a day of fishing at Wolf Lake, but enough dedicated volunteers from organizations like the Department of Natural Resources' Urban Fishing Program, Chicago Parks, local sportsmen's clubs and the Knights of Columbus for the rodeo participants to receive help one on one.

"The Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF) is dedicated to the promotion of recreational programs for all people," said Jess Hansen, ICF executive director. "A program that makes one of Illinois' favorite outdoor pastimes available to those with special needs is the perfect manifestation of the ICF mission."

Participants, coordinators and volunteers alike end the day reluctantly and look forward to next year's event.

"When you see the looks on people's faces who usually have no possibility of going fishing by themselves....when you see them catch a fish it makes the whole day worth it," said Joe Hodges, the coordinator of the fishing rodeo for the Hegewisch Chamber of Commerce. "You know then that you're making a difference."

**Individual fishing buddies help make the annual Chicagoland fishing rodeo a success.**

The Illinois Conservation Foundation, an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, has raised more than $20 million to support the programs of the Department of Natural Resources. Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. For more information, including details on the grant program, contact Executive Director Jess Hansen, Illinois Conservation Foundation, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702, phone (217) 785-2003 or visit www.ilcf.org.

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