

BassEye contest /

Record-setting day for Cinelli

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BassEye Celebrity Challenge competitors enjoyed a typical, diverse day of fishing Friday out of Buffalo Small Boat Harbor.

For 10 years, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation fundraiser has been a frustrating fun raiser for charter captains, attending celebrities, and supporting crew members.

This year, weather conditions were more comfy for sunbathers and shoreline strollers. Gentle winds, partially clouded sunny skies, and warm air and water temperatures offered a challenge for bass and walleye catching out of Buffalo Harbor.

The two top winning teams showed that good catches of both species could be found and caught near and far.

Capt. Chris Cinelli, of Cinelli's Niagara Fishing Guides, broke team-total records for 10 years of this competition with a final score of 6,150 points.

Teams must catch at least one bass and one walleye to score a BassEye and enter final competition. Cinelli's team logged 32 bass measuring at least 14 inches and 18 walleye measuring 18 inches.

Team member Paul Billoni took honors for the individual angler catching the most bass; Billoni landed and measured 15 smallmouths. Dick Hill, another Cinelli team member, hooked into seven walleye at or above the 18- inch mark. Angelo Puccio rounded out the three-angler Colvin Cleaners team aboard Cinelli's craft.

"We never went more than a half mile from the harbor," Cinelli said of their trolling treks that took them along Donolly's Wall, near the Roundhouse water intake, and above the river currents in New York State.

The worm harness took most of their fish, and Cinelli noted the worm was a greater attractant than the color or design of the spinner blades.

Capt. Don Ruppert's Wave Tamer team came in second with a total of 3,700 points. Ruppert trolled lead-core line and worm harness (mainly with green blades) out deep along the International Line outside Seneca Shoals and Myers Reef.

His team caught bass and walleye throughout the day until the 2 p.m. quitting time.

“We found walleyes out there of all sizes,” Ruppert said of the open-water fishery well off shore.

Other fish-catching awards went to these recipients: Largest Bass, 19.5 inches, Paul Snyder; Largest Walleye, 31.75 inches, Tom Heary; and Most Outstanding Catch, 36.5-inch musky, Al Wentland.

CFF executive director Kelly Kopra thanked all contributors, sponsors, and volunteers for their generous help with this year’s program. Kopra then cited 14 charter captains who have participated in all 10 years of BassEye competitions. She presented recognition honors to Captains Larry Balch, Frank Campbell, Chris Cinelli, Jeff Draper, Joe Fonzi, Jim Gordon, Jim Hanley, Terry Jones, Ted Kessler, Tom Marks, Mark “Sparky” McGranahan, Barry Schultz and Harry Tolli.

All entrants and participants enjoyed a special summer’s day on Lake Erie waters. Fish hits, catches, sizes and counts varied. But each child or adult battling cystic fibrosis has a better chance for prolonged survival and additional finances for CF research with funds raised during the BassEye events held Thursday and Friday.

For details on CFF programs and progress, go to cff.org.