

Hatchery does commendable area work

By Sarah Sobanski

The North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery hosted its 2017 annual fundraising dinner and auction Saturday, July 15 and you would've been hard pressed to find an empty seat. The curling club was packed full. There were as many tables as possible in the centre, tables of prizes lining every wall, the buffet you'd think the curling club was a big place until the hatchery showed up. It was phenomenal to see locals and visitors come out to support the hatchery. The camaraderie in the room was tangible. Volunteer of the Year for the hatchery Ian Hendry said people were telling him it was the best dinner the hatchery's had yet. With a set of volunteers that contributes more than 8,500 hours annually, it's easy to imagine why.

The hatchery started as a way to combat declining fish populations in the area back in 2001, according to the hatchery's website. It was founded by Dennis and Mary LeFeuvre. The facilities were up in 2007 and it was producing fish by 2008 - first Lake Trout (named the 'jewel') that has adapted over time to the conditions in our area and is more likely to sustain healthy lake trout populations into the future, then brook and brown trout.

Hatchery efforts are run almost entirely by volunteers, including students through education initiatives to the benefit of their environmental and good stewardship education and oversight from the Bancroft's MNRF. Every fall, fish caught from a donor lake are milked for 30 per cent of their eggs or sperm. This is taken back to the hatchery to be raised. The eggs are disinfected to reduce the potential for disease, measured for a quantity estimate, and placed in incubation trays in round combi-tanks, reads the website. Within a few months the fish are actively swimming. By the end of March, the fish are approximately 0.5 to one gram in size. Once they get a little bigger, about that of a finger around June, the fish are moved to larger raceways - this happens again in August. Come fall again, the fish are six to eight inches or 40 grams and can be stocked as fall fingerlings. Fish that are held over until spring will reach approximately 170 to 200 grams (well above the provincial average) by April/May. The bigger the fish, the stronger the fish, the better chance it will survive and not just be gobbled up by other, bigger fish.

The fish are clipped and transported by volunteers in special tanks to their designated lakes. There's a full list of stocked lakes available at www.fishhatchery.ca/operations.

Casting out on the lake when I was a fingerling myself, I never dreamed there was so much that went into raising fish. At the end of the day however, the initiative is one that just makes sense. We take care of the fish, the fish take care of us - to quote Bruce, fish are friends.

Over the last year there's been a lot of talk about the hatchery recruiting a new set of dedicated volunteers to make sure it is run long into the future, for coming generations. If getting down and wet with our finned friends doesn't tickle your fancy, the hatchery also has an adopt a trout program. For \$20, you can see to the rearing of your own trout for area lakes. If you're only up for your annual fishing trip every year, fill out an angler's diary entry. It helps local hatcheries gather information on fish populations and their patterns.