

## Hook, line and sinker

### How the Kincardine Fish Hatchery is making a difference

By Liz Small

Next time you pass along Huron Terrace, past the lighthouse and Station Beach, take a look across the road at the building near Rotary Park. You've probably seen it many times, but didn't really paid attention to what it is. Look a little closer and you'll see that it is home to The Lake Huron Fishing Club Trout Hatchery (LHFC). Within its walls, they're doing some very important work – raising brown and rainbow trout to restock lakes and rivers and ensure future generations can enjoy these fish, too.

Built in the early 90s, LHFC is operated solely by volunteers, relying on donations to help pay for the costs of raising the fish from eggs to release.

Long-time volunteer Wayne Passmore and soon-to-be hatchery manager, Shawna Mills, are passionate about the work that's being done here and the importance of giving back to the environment.

"I love fishing", said Mills. "For me, if I'm going to take fish from the rivers, I need to put fish back into the rivers."

Passmore has a long history as a hatchery volunteer, first in Port Elgin in the 80s, before joining the Kincardine hatchery in the early 90s.

Mills has been a volunteer for about eight years, first on a daily crew, before becoming volunteer co-ordinator, treasurer and managing hatchery tours. She will soon take over as manager, when, she said, "I've learned it all." And there is definitely a lot to learn.

The building was constructed in 1992, with the hatchery raising fish the next year. An astounding 120,000 yearling trout are raised from eggs to adult, before being released into the

waters of Lake Huron and its tributaries each year. While there are other area hatcheries – Port Elgin, Collingwood, Chatsworth, Sarnia, Bruce Peninsula and Sydenham – Passmore said the Kincardine hatchery has set some very high standards.

"We've got signs in the office from the Ministry," said Passmore, "They call this the Cadillac of hatcheries."

The brown trout from the hatchery are released along the shoreline and the rainbow are released in the Saugeen River.

"We have people come from all over to fish the Saugeen," said Mills. "It's now one of the premiere trout fishing spots in Canada."

#### How does a hatchery work?

It all starts with the harvesting of the eggs of from brown and rainbow trout. It's a task that's highly regulated, the Ministry keeping a close watch over the process. It's not a job for just anyone, as you need to have a light touch and a quick hand, taking care there is no blood present in the eggs.

"When you touch their belly, you push down and the eggs shoot out," said Mills.

One fish could yield 6,000 to 8,000 eggs, and once brought to the hatchery, the survival rate is as high as 80 per cent. The eggs are placed in egg trays and eventually released into one of eight tanks, depending on their size. Each tank contains trout at different stages of their life.

Just as important in this process is the water used to fill the tanks and it's not your average tap water. It comes from an artesian well deep underground, pumped from the lake, under the road and into boxes in order to aerate them, a process that adds life-giving oxygen to the water. The water is a consistent 50 degrees F (10 degrees C).



Passmore shows some of the young trout.

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1. Give them plenty of space. Due to their weight, big rigs take longer to stop and manoeuvre. Maintain a safe following distance of at least three to four car lengths. Trucks also need extra space to turn, so anticipate wide swings when rounding a corner.
2. Know their blind spots. Trucks have large blind spots on their sides, front and directly behind the trailer. Avoid lingering next to a truck, especially on the right side. If you can't see the truck driver in their mirror, they can't see you.
3. Pass safely and decisively. When passing a truck, use your turn signal well in advance and only pass when the oncoming lane is empty. Once you've passed the truck, use your turn signal again before merging back into your lane.
4. Minimize distractions. Driving requires focus, especially near large vehicles. Put down your phone, avoid fiddling with the radio and stay alert to the road and the truck's movements.
5. Be predictable. Erratic driving is dangerous around any vehicle, but big rigs have less room for error. Signal your intentions, maintain a steady speed and avoid weaving in and out of traffic.

Remember, everyone deserves to arrive at their destination safely. A little patience and respect goes a long way.



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# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



Passmore explains the purpose of the waste pool.



Hatchery volunteers Wayne Passmore and Shawna Mills.



Inside the hatchery.

"It never changes, in the summer or the winter," explained Passmore. "Because of that, the fish can survive."

On average, two to four people are needed for each daily crew, assisting with tank cleaning, tours and ensuring everything runs smoothly.

New to the hatchery is Andrew Evans, a recent graduate of Sir Stanley Fleming College, who majored in fish and wildlife. He moved to Kincardine in March and began volunteering soon after.

"I'm so happy to be doing this. I love it," he said. "I'm not a big angler but I want to make sure, for the future, there are rivers and lakes stocked with these fish. I think there's a lot of fishermen that purge the lakes and we have to make sure these guys carry on the legacy."

It's all hands on deck, plus a few more, when it comes time to do the yearly fin clipping, as there are approximately 60,000 fish that need clipping.

"It's how the Ministry marks the fish, to know they're hatchery raised," explained Mills. "You take the back fin off. It doesn't affect them. You put the fish on a moist pad, take scissors and cut the tiny fin and put them back in

the tank."

"It doesn't hurt the fish," added Passmore. "It's got to be cut right flush because if it's not, it can grow back. The Ministry says we have to do it. We can't even release any fish without them knowing where they're going and when they're going."

Each and every step along the way is closely watched and regulated.

"There's a lot of testing and regulations," said Mills. "Everything we do has a form."

Another challenge they face is having the funds to cover the costs of the hatchery.

"We raise the money ourselves, through fundraisers and donations," said Passmore. "We have fish fries and draws and the Ministry of Natural Resources gives us a token amount."

The annual Chantry Chinook Fish Derby helps raise funds to help with the operating costs, including the food pellets.

"We go through easily one bag a day. One bag is worth \$60 plus," said Passmore.

And with nearly 2,000 fish in just one tank, that's a whole lot of food.

The feeding apparatus was hand-

made by one of the volunteers and is set on a timer, which automatically releases the pellets every half hour from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The hatchery is also equipped with an alarm system should power go out, alerting members that there could be a problem. They also have a generator on site, which Passmore said has been a life-saver.

"We used to have to run down in the middle of the night and start a gas pump across the road, and run back to make sure the water is running and adjust the valves. Things have improved a lot."

Both Passmore and Mills are passionate about the work they do and the reasons they do it, is obvious.

"So many anglers take so many fish," said Mills. "I can go to Denny's Dam at any given day and I could easily see a hundred fish taken from the river. That's just one day. The fish population needs to sustain itself and with numbers like that coming out, we need to put numbers back in. We have to give back to the ecosystem to help it thrive."

Passmore couldn't agree more.

"If we don't do it, they could lose a lot of fish. They wouldn't be there," he said. "People wouldn't be fishing the Saugeen like they are right now."

Passmore and Mills expressed their thanks and gratitude to the many volunteers who help make the hatchery

run smoothly, including those who have donated and the Ontario Steelheaders, who play a large role, assisting with fin clipping, collecting eggs and more.

## About LHFC

LHFC was established in 1983, with their mission being to ensure future generations have quality fishing opportunities through education, promotion, protection, collaboration and enhancement of aquatic activities and resources. Their work contributes to erosion control, reforestation, stream improvements and fish restocking.

They rely on donations and work of their many volunteers to continue this important work. The LHFC welcomes volunteers to support the various daily activities. Opportunities are available to help with schools, trout and salmon hatcheries, derby committee, derby weigh stations, Kincardine docks, computer skills and stream enhancements. The School Hatchery Program expanded from three schools in 2012 to 50 schools in 2020. High school student volunteer hours can also be done at the hatchery.

To book a tour of the hatchery, email: [info@lakehuronfishingclub.com](mailto:info@lakehuronfishingclub.com) or call 519-386-8349. To learn more, visit [www.lakehuronfishingclub.com](http://www.lakehuronfishingclub.com).



A sample of fish pellets.

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