

## HISTORY OF THE FIRST WISCONSIN CHAPTER OF MUSKIES, INC.

1976 to 1987

Written by Kermit Benson

### Introduction

This is a factual record of the activities of the First Wisconsin Chapter of Muskies, Inc. based upon the Muskies, Inc. Newsletter, Muskie magazine, newspaper and magazine articles, letters and our monthly Follow Up, which I have accumulated since joining Muskies, Inc. on March 1, 1976. It is dedicated to our members past and present who have made our chapter the great organization that it is.

### 1976

Early in 1976, Gil Hamm, Founder of Muskies, Inc. solicited the help of Elmo Korn of Chippewa Falls to organize a chapter of Muskies, Inc. in our area. Elmo rounded up some of his friends and on March 1, 1986 an organizational meeting was held at The Bank of New Auburn in New Auburn, WI.

Thirty two members and interested individuals attended. Frank Schneider Jr. of the Twin Cities Chapter presided over the meeting until officers were elected.

Frank told some "fish stories" which were received with hearty laughter and gave us the impression that there were some good times to be had in Muskies, Inc. Having put us all in a good mood, Frank and Gil then explained the functions and purposes of Muskies, Inc. An interesting question and answer session followed and after a short break the film titled "American Sportsman" was shown. This film featured Milburn Stone and Ken Curtis of "Gunsmoke" fame, out muskie fishing with Gil Hamm. We were impressed to say the least.

We decided to become a chapter of Muskies, Inc. and the following officers were elected: Lloyd Siverling, President; Norb Ruff, Vice President; Charles Hanson, Treasurer; Judy Romunstad, Secretary and Elmo Korn, Regional Vice President.

This was the first chapter of Muskies, Inc. to be organized in the State of Wisconsin, so we decided to call it the First Wisconsin Chapter of Muskies, Inc. The vote was unanimous.

At that time, there was no "International" organization. The Twin Cities Chapter was the parent organization. They gave us a check in the amount of \$300.00 as "seed" money to help get the chapter started and we were on our way

The second meeting of our chapter was held at the Chippewa Rod and Gun Club in Chippewa Falls, with Gil Hamm and Bob Langfield of the Twin Cities Chapter present to assist us in getting off to a good start. The first year our meetings were held in various places in order for everyone to attend without driving the longest distance every month. Meetings were held at The Eagles Club and the Town & Country Tavern in Chippewa Falls, Dave Harris' tavern in Fall Creek and the Bloomer Golf Course club house.

We did not have an elected Board of Directors at that time. Our "Board" simply consisted of the chapter officers and some of the most active members. That groups first meeting was held at Norb Ruff's home in Bloomer, WI.

At the June meeting a committee was formed to select a place for our chapters first outing. That outing was held at Bone Lake in August. Most of us were camping out and it was so cold we near froze! Two muskies were caught at that outing. Ray Wood kept a 40+ inch muskie and Lloyd Siverling released a 31+ incher. Kermit Benson gave a fireside recitation Saturday evening and a good time was had by all in spite of the cold weather.

At the November meeting, held at the Town & Country Tavern a committee was formed to plan a tournament for 1977. That committee consisted of Jerry Green, Verlin Eckwright, Dick Spenser, Kermit Benson, Lloyd Siverling and Dave Harris.

The year 1976 ended on a sour note for the First Wisconsin Chapter. We had about 60 members and half of them were ready to drop out. The Twin Cities Chapter had promised to give us 500 muskies from their hatchery at Battle Lake, MN. but we were not given the fish and many of our members were very disturbed about it. It was not the fault of the Twin Cities Chapter however, because when they harvested their muskies that year, the Minnesota DNR would not let them transport the fish out of that state.

But what was to become one of the most progressive chapters of Muskies, Inc. was born. Also born in 1976 was an idea that would really put our chapter on the map

Our Regional Vice President, Elmo Korn, wanted to build a rearing pond on a property near Pike Lake in Chippewa County, so he asked Art Oehmcke of the Wisconsin DNR about it. Art thought it would require too many man-hours and too much technical supervision. He suggested that if our chapter wanted to raise muskies, that we use a sewage treatment facility as a rearing pond, in cooperation with the DNR. That idea resulted in much publicity for our chapter in the following two years.

The chapter's cash balance on December 13th 1976 was only \$31.96. We had spent most of the "seed money" on patches, decals and some calendars which we hoped to sell as a fund raiser.

## 1977

On January 10, 1977 the following officers were elected: Kermit Benson, President; Royal Bowlin, Vice President; Verlin Eckwright, Treasurer and Karen Hoepner, Secretary.

Upon assuming the Presidency of the chapter, Kermit set three goals for the chapter in 1977. These were: to establish a rearing pond project, sponsor a muskie tournament and increase the membership to 200. In addition, he instigated a policy, that each chapter activity, excluding the rearing pond project, was to pay its own way. By December of '77 we had 190 members and the other goals had been met. The cash balance on December 12th was \$1391.53.

The year 1977 was a year of growth and much activity for the chapter. The chapter participated in its first sports show on February 17th at the Hilton Hotel & Civic Center in Eau Claire. The chapter show booth - built on the spot - was very attractive and was used at many more shows.

At the February meeting the following additional officers and Chairmen were elected: Clarence Hotchkiss, Second Vice President; Bob Buonincontro, Assistant Treasurer; Mike Malone, Membership Chairman and Jerry Green, Merchandise Chairman.

We still did not have an elected Board of Directors.

On February 22nd Kermit received a call from member Darrell Hoepner informing him that Potato Lake in Rusk County was freezing out. The chapter joined several clubs in the New Auburn area in an effort to save the fishery in Potato Lake. A pump and spillway were obtained from our DNR and the North Star Implement Co. of New Auburn loaned us a diesel tractor to power the pump. The groups set this equipment up and shared the cost of fuel for the tractor. They also furnished men to man the pump 24 hours a day. After 14 days of continuous pumping, the oxygen level in the lake was up to an acceptable level and the fishery was saved. The lake remains a productive muskie fishery.

During the Spring of '77, Elmo Korn, provided with a list of sewage plants by Art Oehmcke of the DNR, toured our area searching for a pond that would be suitable for the raising of muskies. Art's DNR crew also scouted out several ponds.

A pond at Dorchester, WI. was finally chosen because of its fine quality of water and excellent management. On June 7th 5,000 muskie fingerlings, averaging three inches in length, were planted in one of the finishing ponds at Dorchester by our DNR. An Adjacent pond was planted with minnows as seed for forage, in 1978.

During the months of June, July and August about 25 members headed by Dan Pabst seined and trapped over 1,000 pounds of minnows to feed the fingerlings. Minnow traps were built by chapter members under the supervision of Bob Zempel of the Twin Cities Chapter, who volunteered to help. Chapter members made 14 feeding trips to the pond at Dorchester, a distance of about 60 miles from our area. About 400 manhours were spent on this activity. Seining headquarters were set up at Dave Harris' place in Fall Creek as most of the seining was done near there in the Eau Claire River.

The Wisconsin DNR also provided 1,125 pounds of minnows for the project. It was the first time a fishing organization had ever cooperated with the Wisconsin DNR in the raising of purebred muskies.

On August 24th the pond was drained and the muskies harvested. 3,014 muskie fingerlings from 9 to 12 inches in length, with a total weight of about 560 pounds were harvested, for a recovery of 60%. The fish were stocked in five area lakes. The project made history. It was the first time that purebred muskies had been raised in a sewage plant finishing pond.

Several chapter outings were held in 1977, the most memorable of which was one held at Lake Winter on July 16th and 17th. Many members were caught in a sudden, violent, straight line wind storm that had all the earmarks of a tornado! The scramble of boats trying to get back to headquarters at the Rustic Inn looked like the Indy 500 on water. Mr. & Mrs. Milton Schette did not return but were later found and escorted back to the Rustic Inn safely. Two members beached their boat and hitched a ride back to headquarters.

On October 1 and 2 the chapter held its first tournament in the Lake Holcombe area. Wisconsin and Minnesota had been saturated with posters and brochures and the event was advertised in the August issue of the Muskies, Inc. Newsletter. There was much concern about the tournament being a profitable one because the chapter was offering about \$3000 worth of prizes and it was all on credit. So the tournament committee decided to run a Queen Contest in conjunction with the tournament, the queen contestant selling the greatest number of buttons being the winner. Kermit solicited the help of Rose Wawrzyniak, known as "Jump River Rosie" to represent the Holcombe area. She sold 2,700 buttons at \$1.00 each, assuring the financial success of the tournament.

104 contestants participated in the tournament and the chapter came out smelling like a rose! The chapter's cash balance jumped from \$121.21 on September 12th to \$1451.49 on November 14th. The Twin Cities Chapter Board of Directors breathed a sigh of relief when they heard about it, as they had set aside a large sum of money to bail us out with if we fell on our behinds.

Winner in the Weight Division was Bill Henck of Clear Lake, WI. with a 21 pound 5 ounce muskie and winner in the Release Division was Jim Collins of Brooklyn Center, MN.

In the Fall of 1977, an attempt was made to introduce legislation that would regulate tournament fishing in Wisconsin. Kermit wrote many letters to the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board protesting the bill. The bill was killed after Kermit and some resort owners from Vilas County testified at a hearing in Madison, WI.

## 1978

On December 12, 1977 the following officers were elected: Kermit Benson, President Royal Bowlin Vice President; Dick Bloczynski, Second Vice President; Barbara Bowlin, Secretary; Caroline Benson, Assistant Secretary; Verlin Eckwright, Treasurer and Mike Malone, Assistant Treasurer.

The following chairmen were appointed and accepted: Mike Malone, Memberships; Pete Rone, Merchandise; Dick Bloczynski, Tournament and Dan Pabst, Rearing Pond.

Kermit informed the members that the chapter should have an elected Board of Directors. It was decided that the above officers and chairmen would comprise the Board of Directors for 1978.

In the early days of Muskies, Inc.'s expansion, chapters were provided with \$300.00 in "seed money" and the By-Laws required that chapters send all receipts in excess of that amount to Muskies, Inc. in Minneapolis, MN. The idea of this was that the Twin Cities Chapter, which was the parent organization, would control the cash flow, so that chapters could help each other financially. At the January meeting, Kermit informed the members that according to the By-Laws, the chapter would have to send most of our tournament profits to the Twin Cities. This caused the chapter to rebel!

The next day, Kermit informed Gil Hamm that the chapter was ready to break away from Muskies, Inc. As a result, Gil sent DuWayne Bakke, Treasurer, to our first official Board meeting which was held at Bob Buono's supper club in Eau Claire. DuWayne explained this "cash flow" thing to us but the Board refused to send the tournament profits to the Twin Cities. It was a stormy meeting to say the least! The parent organization subsequently decided that we could manage our own funds "until the end of the year". Well, in the meanwhile, Larry Ramsell had been out East organizing several chapters of Muskies, Inc. and the Twin Cities Chapter began to realize that they would not have the funds to send each chapter \$300.00 in "seed money". They decided the "cash flow" idea would not work, so they told us we could manage our own funds period.

At that time, the Muskies, Inc. By-Laws were revised, the Twin Cities Chapter became a chapter and the "International" was born. Board meetings were held monthly at the Minnesota Press Club in the Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis. Kermit seldom missed one of these meetings.

Dick Bloczynski was so disturbed over the above money matter that he resigned as Tournament Chairman at that first chapter board meeting. Failing to get any volunteers, Kermit took over the job. Dick helped a lot with the tournament in '78 however and acted as the Chairman of Shows that year.

The chapters first Awards Banquet was held at Ristorante Buono's in Eau Claire, WI. on March 12, 1978. The turn out was good and it was a first class knife and fork affair. Steve Henry of WEAU TV in Eau Claire was the emcee. Speakers were Larry Ramsell, Art Oehmcke and Frank Schneider Jr.. The Darrell Hoepner family walked off with most of the awards.

In March of '78, the chapter participated in two sports shows at the London Square Mall in Eau Claire. Thirteen members were signed up and the receipts from merchandise and button sales were 100% higher than in '77.

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, the chapter sponsored a fishing clinic at the Eagles Club. About 80 interested fishermen showed up for this event. The speakers were: Elmo Korn on fishing equipment; Bob Buonincontro on structure fishing and Kermit Benson on what not to do. This was an excellent exercise in public relations for our chapter.

In April of '78 we had our first catch charts printed. We distributed them to area resorts and weigh in stations and retrieved them at the end of the season. The information compiled on these charts proved to be a valuable aid to the DNR in the West Central District in planning their stocking quotas.

In April, we also started a "Big Brother Program" with Mike Malone as Chairman. The program was designed to match up novice fishermen with some of our chapters "experts".

During the Summer of '78, a controversy developed over the annual drawdown of Lake Holcombe by Northern States Power Co. The chapter members attended two protest meetings at Lake Holcombe. As a result, the DNR and Northern States Power Co. worked out a better system for the annual drawdown which has saved a lot of forage fish for the lakes muskies.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1500 fingerlings were introduced to the sewage plant at Dorchester. Chapter members did some seining but many of the minnows used that year were trapped out of the adjacent ponds, which had been seeded in '77. The minnow ponds started to show signs that a toxic chemical had gotten into them, so we harvested the fingerlings early in order to save them. 911 fingerlings were saved for a recovery of 60%. They were stocked in Lake Holcombe and Lake Wissota.

The chapter participated in its third show of the year in August, at the Northern Wisconsin State Fair. That show resulted in some good publicity for our chapter.

The chapters second annual Wisconsin-National Musky Tournament was held in the Lake Holcombe area on September 22, 23 & 24, 1978. "Jump River Rosie" again won the queen Contest by selling 2500 buttons. There were 151 contestants that year. First place in the Weight Division went to Don Glinski of Eau Claire with a 39 pound 7 ounce muskie. Close on his heels was Terry Moulton with a 33 pound 6 ounce beauty for second place. Jim Collins of Brooklyn Center, MN. was again the winner in the Release Division with an astonishing 50 points.

In December of '78 Kermit stepped down as chapter President. It had been a big two years of growth under his leadership. The chapter went from 60 members and a cash balance of \$31.96 in December of '76 to 288 members and a cash balance of \$4,013.65 in December of 1978.

At the December '78 meeting the following officers were elected: Royal Bowlin, President; Mike Malone, Vice President; Barbara Bowlin, Secretary and Mark Krmpotich, Treasurer.

1979

At the January 1979 meeting Mike Malone volunteered to serve as Membership Chairman and he reported that membership was up to 290. Verlin Eckwright volunteered as Tournament Chairman and the following members volunteered to serve on that committee: Royal & Barb Bowlin; Kermit Benson; Mike Malone; Pete Rone, Clarence Hotchkiss, Mark Krmpotich and Bill Yeager.

Kermit informed the chapter that according to the By-Laws, the Regional Vice President should be elected annually and since our RVP was last elected in 1976, he made a motion that Elmo Korn be officially re-elected. This was done by a show of hands.

On January 18th, 1979 Bob Buonincontro and Kermit Benson attended the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Indianhead Association. There they explained the functions and purposes of Muskies, Inc. and asked the association to start a Release Division on its Lucky 13 TV show on WEAU, channel 13. This was done and it was probably the most significant boost for the release concept ever, in the State of Wisconsin

In February, Verlin Eckwright started working on a tagging program. Verlin showed our members the equipment we were planning to use. At that time, he was trying to get DNR approval to use it during the '79 season.

Mike Malone took on the job of computerizing the entire Muskies, Inc. membership. Mike spent literally hundreds of hours of voluntary hours of work organizing all the data as it was the first time the Muskies, Inc. membership had been computerized and it was another first for our chapter.

In February of '79, Kermit Benson organized the Wisconsin Chapters of Muskies, Inc. The first meeting was held on March 25, 1979 at the Northwoods Inn, in Fifield, WI. with about 30 members present. There were 3 chapters in Wisconsin at that time.

The chapter started its first youth program in March of '79. We sent a junior member to a two week camp, sponsored by the Wisconsin DNR, where the youth learned about environment and conservation.

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1979, the chapter's second annual Awards Banquet was held at Ristorante Buono's in Eau Claire. Peter Murphy of WEAQ radio emceed the event. Frank Schneider Jr. was the principal speaker, even though he just had an operation days before. Steve Henry of WEAU TV was also a speaker. The event was again a big success, a good time being had by all.

The chapter participated in a sports show at London Square Mall March 28th through April 1st of '79 where three new members were recruited.

The chapter, having made a decision not to try raising muskies in a sewage plant again, was looking for a new pond. Mark Krmpotich coordinated the search. Royal Bowlin found a couple of ponds in the Chetek area but the chapter members felt that Chetek, like Dorchester, was a bit too far from our immediate area.

A suitable pond was finally found on the Bob Marek farm near Cadott, WI. Bob leased the pond to the chapter for ten years in exchange for free membership to Muskies, Inc.. Members of the chapter spent the summer of '79 making improvements at the pond. The work included draining the pond and cleaning it out. A pipe and valve for draining the pond were installed. Member Les Henning volunteered a backhoe for the job.

Kermit Benson was elected as an At Large Director of the International organization in '79, giving our chapter two votes on the Board of Directors.

In June of '79, the chapter got its tagging program started on Lake Wissota. Three muskies were tagged the first month. In July, the new Release Division on the "Lucky 13" fishing show on WEAU TV was going strong with 37 muskies entered in one week

Verlin Eckwright introduced a new and attractive design for our tournament patch which was adopted.

The chapter held several outings in '79, the most memorable of which was at Spider Lake where Pete Rone caught a 25 pounder at 1:00 A.M. on August 26th.

In September, the chapter was commended by the Northern Wisconsin District Fair Board, for baby sitting a live fish display at the Northern Wisconsin State Fair in August. This gave us some good publicity.

Our third annual Wisconsin-National Musky Tournament was held in the Lake Holcombe area on September 21, 22 & 23. There were 184 contestants. Twenty two fish were caught with 17 being released. Harold Flater of Holcombe, WI won the Weight Division with a 16 pound 12 ounce muskie. Larry Lee of Minong, WI took the Release Division with 30 points. Our "Queen", "Jump River Rosie" caught a muskie the first day. She was told when she started, "you'll get calluses my dear". She replied, "if I do, they won't be on my rear". She also caught an 8 pound walleye.

At the December meeting the following officers were elected:

Mike Malone, President; Terry Moulton, First Vice President; Wayne Gutsch, Second Vice President; Barbara Bowlin, Secretary; Mary Buonincontro, Assistant Secretary; Mark Krmpotich, Treasurer; Joe Heil, Assistant Treasurer and Bob Buonincontro, Regional Vice President. New Board members elected were: Verlin Eckwright, Bill La Bonte, Clarence Hotchkiss and Jim Haas.

## 1980

We started out 1980 by changing our meeting nights to the first Monday evening of the month in order to make the monthly deadline for the Muskies, Inc. Newsletter.

Pete Rone replaced Wayne Gutsch as Second Vice President because Wayne moved to the Hayward area.

The tournament committee for 1980 consisted of: Clarence Hotchkiss, Les Henning, Mike Belger, Joe Heil, Royal & Barb Bowlin, Mark Krmpotich, Terry Kinderman, Verlin Eckwright, Mark Fedie & Dan Pabst.

Mark Fedie was our Pond Chairman and Terry Kinderman was our Membership Chairman.

On March 14 & 15, the chapter worked a sports show at London Square Mall and on the 16th we sponsored a fishing clinic at the Eagles Club. These two events running so close together really kept us busy. We had a raffle going in conjunction with these two events and it went so good that we had to have additional tickets printed. Spence Petros was the speaker at the fishing clinic which went over big.

The second annual meeting of the Wisconsin Chapters of Muskies, Inc. was held at the Northwoods Inn at Fifield, WI on March 1st 1979 with Roger Erickson, Muskies, Inc. Administrator acting as the Chairman. Eighteen members attended.

On March 8th Kermit Benson of our chapter was elected Second Vice President and Secretary of Muskies, Inc. International at Brooklyn Park, MN.

In April of '80 our chapter donated \$300 to a study being made by the DNR to determine why there were so many stunted muskies in several lakes in the Hayward area.

We also started helping the DNR with a study of stomach contents of walleyes coming out of Lake Wissota to determine why so many of these fish are stunted. Mark Krmopotich organized the area anglers for this research project.

The 1980 Awards Banquet was held at the Country Villa in Tilden, WI. Barbara Bowlin was presented with a plaque for her outstanding service to the chapter. Darrell Hoepner and a group of barber shop quartet singers provided us with a very enjoyable program.

In June, 2500 muskie fingerlings were introduced to the new pond at Cadott. We harvested 1410 fingerlings, averaging 9 inches in length that year for a recovery rate of 56%. We stocked 310 fish in Lake Holcombe and 1100 in Lake Wissota. Some fingerlings were lost during high water but Mark Fedie and crew rescued 100 of them out of Paint Creek with nets.

Barbara Bowlin acted as Chairperson for our tournament in 1980. Our 4th annual Wisconsin-National Musky Tournament was held in the Lake Holcombe area on September 19, 20 & 21. Tom Prissel of Durand, WI took first place in the Weight Division with a 31 pound 14 ounce muskie and Terry Moulton was the Release Division winner. Our 1980 tournament raised over \$1000 for our rearing pond.

Patty Eckwright and Jenny Bowlin, attended a DNR Natural Resources Workshop near Poynette, WI for a week in 1980 as our youth representatives and upon their return they gave a very comprehensive report to the chapter.

Chapter outings were held at Lake Holcombe, Spider Lake and Lower Long Lake in '80 and we had a good time at all of them.

The chapter rounded out the year by donating another \$300 to the DNR to help them continue their creel census studies in the Hayward area.

At the December meeting the following officers were elected to lead the chapter in 1981: Verlin Eckwright, President; Royal Bowlin, First Vice President; Bill La Bonte, Second Vice President; Barb Bowlin, Secretary~ Patty Eckwright, Assistant Secretary~ Ken Imm, Treasurer; Joe Hell Assistant Treasurer and Clarence Hotchkiss, Regional Vice President. Five additional Board members were elected.

During 1980, the Wisconsin Chapters of Muskies, Inc. and the Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin were at odds over the issues of motor trolling and tournaments. A meeting was finally held on December 20th where the issues were resolved. Kermit Benson, Mike Malone and Bob Buonincontro represented the First Wisconsin Chapter.

1981

In February of '81 Joe Heil volunteered to be Merchandise Chairman and Mike Belger volunteered to be Tournament Chairman. Dave Sumner agreed to be the Welcoming Chairman.

The chapter started three new fund raisers in '81. These were, the sale of "Musky Lover Buttons", fishing logs and "Live Log" prints. The buttons were distributed to business places all around our area on cards.

On February 6, 7 and 8 we participated in a boat show at the Eau Claire Civic Center, sponsored by Nelson Sports Center. Quentin Nelson rewarded our chapter for its help in the show by giving us \$150.00 credit towards tournament prizes. We also sold \$160.00 in merchandise and signed up 11 new members at the show.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, we attended a meeting of the Wisconsin Chapters in Fifield.

The chapter Awards Banquet was held at the Elks Club in Eau Claire on March 28th. Thanks to Mike and Marcia Malone and their committee it was one of our best banquets ever with Terry Moulton as "Windy Dinkleman" providing the entertainment, including numerous Polish jokes.

By June of '81, 24 muskies had been tagged in Lake Wissota and a wealth of information had been compiled on the movements of these fish.

On August 1st the chapter suffered a big loss when Past President Mike Malone was struck by lightning while muskie fishing out on Grindstone Lake near Hayward, WI.

It should be noted that Clarence Hotchkiss of our chapter released a 49+ inch muskie at Lake Holcombe. It was the longest released muskie for our chapter at the time. He suffered a heart attack in the process but recovered and continued to be one of our most active members.

Probably the most memorable outing in '81 was held at Lake Holcombe on August 22 and 23. Three muskies were released and Gena La Bonte released her first muskie ever - a 35 incher.

The pond project in '81 was again a big success. We started out with 3500 fingerlings and when the pond was harvested we recovered 1465 fingerlings averaging from 8 to 12 inches in length. These were stocked in Lake Holcombe. A few muskies got hung up in the weeds when we drained the pond but the recovery was still good.

Our 5th annual tournament was held on September 18, 19 & 20, 1981. Jim Moe of the God's Country Chapter landed a 30 pound muskie the day before the contest started. The tournament, under Mike Belger's Chairmanship was again a successful fundraiser for the chapter. Gerald Lybert of Holcombe, WI won the Weight Division with a 37 pounder. Dennis Arndt, fishing with "Jump River Rosie", took the Release Division with 31 points.

At the December meeting the following officers were elected for the year 1982; Bob Buonincontro, President; Dan Pabst, First Vice President; Tony Fransway, Second Vice President; Ken Imm, Treasurer; Joe Heil, Assistant Treasurer; Marcia Malone, Secretary; Barbara Bowlin, Assistant Secretary and Clarence Hotchkiss, Regional Vice President. New Board members elected were: Jim Bunch, Royal Bowlin, Bill La Bonte, Mark Krmpotich and Archie Eckwright.

## 1982

The year 1982 got off to a good start. President Bob Buonincontro lined up some good programs. At our February meeting, Vince Rakow of the Twin Cities Chapter showed us his home movie called "The Hog Barn" - a super film on the catching of huge muskies in Canada. Bob also instigated the placing of posters at local sports shops encouraging people to join our chapter.

Jim Bunch volunteered to be Tournament Chairman and began the planning early.

Most of our meetings in '82 were held at the Lake Hallie Sportsmans Club because we no longer had enough room at the Eagles Club.

Early in 1982, we volunteered to contribute to the stocking of 140,000 perch in Lake Wissota, along with other area sports groups, to provide forage for muskies and walleyes.

In 1982, our Awards Banquet was held at the Elks Club in Eau Claire Terry Moulton again provided the entertainment - Mrs. Windy Dinklemen stood out from the crowd with her green streaked hair and her rummage sale floral tent dress and her blue sneakers. At this event we started a new award, "The Mike Malone Service Award", in memory of Past President Mike Malone. Marcia Malone and her committee secretly select the recipient each year.

In 1982 the God's Country Chapter in La Crosse joined our chapter in our rearing pond project by making it possible for us to receive a \$1,000 donation from the G. Heileman Brewing Co. In addition, Heileman's donated \$495 worth of trophies for our State Fishing Contest. There was some discussion at our meeting of the Wisconsin Chapters that year, to make our rearing pond a cooperative pond with the other chapters but this never materialized.

We received 5,000 muskie fingerlings from the DNR in 1982. When the pond was harvested, we had a recovery rate of 50%, for 2,500 fingerlings, which is considered very good. We stocked 1200 of these fish in Lake Wissota, and 1100 in Lake Holcombe. We stocked 200 fingerlings in the Black River near Melrose, WI to satisfy the chapter in La Crosse. Past President Verlin Eckwright was instrumental in obtaining a truck from the Bake Rite Baking Co. in Eau Claire for the sum of \$1.00. We planned to haul minnows in this truck but because of liability insurance, license fees etc. we did not use the truck and finally got rid of it.

During 1982, Kermit Benson set up the Muskies, Inc. display case at the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame in Hayward, WI.

Our 6th annual Wisconsin-National Musky Tournament was held on September 17, 18 & 19, 1982. Under Chairman Jim Bunch's leadership the tournament was a big success, even though we lowered the entry fees and cut the value of prizes in half. Wolfgang Hammermeister of West Allis, WI was the winner of the Weight Division with a 28 pound 6 ounce muskie and Eugene Hays took the Release Division with 32+ points.

We had several outings in '82 including one at Potato Lake and another at Lake Holcombe. A State outing was also held at Holcombe with many members from the other Wisconsin chapters participating.

At our December meeting, the following officers were elected for the new year: Jim Bunch, President; Tony Fransway, First Vice President; Al Klages, Second Vice President; Barbara Bowlin, Secretary; Marcia Malone, Assistant Secretary; Mike Belger, Treasurer; Bob McTavish, Assistant Treasurer and Joe Heil, Regional Vice President. Archie Eckwright was "railroaded in" as Tournament Chairman.

## 1983

Our chapter had been a member club on the Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin since December of 1980 and Bob Buonincontro was a Director of that organization. A controversy developed over a game designed by Dick Rose of the Headwaters Chapter that was similar to Monopoly and pitted the DNR against the sportsmen. The outcome of this was that a lot of adverse publicity appeared in newspapers, International President, Larry Ramsell and Art Ohemcke, President of the Alliance fighting it out in the

press. The result was that the Headwaters Chapter and the Hayward Lakes Chapter dropped out of the Alliance. Dick Moore broke away from Headwaters and started his own chapter in Minocqua.

Larry Ramsell asked our chapter to drop out of the Alliance but we adopted a wait and see policy. We never did formally drop out of the Alliance but we gradually drifted away from that organization.

Early in '83 Al Klages moved to Florida to accept employment there. We were sorry to see Al leave as he was one of our most active members. Kermit Benson was asked to fill in a vacancy on the Board and accepted. Jack Bergeman accepted the Chairmanship of our tagging program and chapter fishing contest.

Outings were held at Potato Lake and Mead Lake in May and June.

The chapter Awards Banquet was again held at the Elks Club in Eau Claire with Terry Moulton again entertaining. He demonstrated the use of his four foot bucktails and his famous "adjustable fly", which is actually the zipper out of a pair of mens trousers ! As usual, it was a good night out for everyone. We should point out that Frank Schneider Jr., who helped organize our chapter, and his wife June, never missed one of our banquets until 1987.

Willy La Bonte found a bait dealer that gave us a good price on minnows and agreed to supply us with any amount, in any size we need. This proved to be a good connection for our chapter. We started out the pond with 7,000 fingerlings in '83.

The G. Heileman Brewing Co. of La Crosse came through with another \$1 ,000 donation for our chapter rearing pond. This time the check was made out directly to the First Wisconsin Chapter. Kermit made a special trip to La Crosse to pick it up.

The chapter sponsored a fishing clinic at the Eagle's Club in '83 with Steve Worrall as our featured speaker. Glenn Carlson, owner of Carlson Discount Sports in Eau Claire, contributed generously to this event which was a money maker for the chapter.

One of the best events of the year for our chapter took place on Sabaskong Bay, Lake of The Woods, Ontario, when our chapter team won the Gil Hamm Memorial Chapter Challenge Tournament. Our chapter was represented by Mark Krmpotich, Willy Hable, Jim Bunch, Ken Imm, Kermit Benson, Jim Coffin, Joe Heil, Dave Sumner, Gary Sly and Lowell Frank. Willy Hable released a 35 pound muskie in this event.

Our chapter had been represented in the "Challenge" for several years, by just a few of our members. Following our victory in '83, the Canadian trip, the first week of August, became the most looked forward to event of the year for many of our members.

The chapters 7th annual tournament was held on September 16, 17 & 18, 1983 in the Holcombe area. Ken Jacobson won the Weight Division with a 30 pound 6 ounce muskie. Jerry Lybert took the Release Division with 2 fish for 25+ points. There were 201 contestants. There were 29 muskies caught with only 6 kept. Archie did pretty good, having been railroaded in as Chairman.

Our rearing pond did very well in '83. We harvested 3,230 fingerlings averaging 10 inches in length. We had a 46.1% survival rate which is very good. The Wisconsin DNR has commended our chapter for our pond which is one of the most productive in the state. There were a total of 250 manhours and 3,000 miles of travel that went into the raising of our fingerlings in 1983. Willy La Bonte really had his heart in the job as Chairman.

Muskies, Inc. Founder Gil Hamm was our guest at the November meeting and told us all about the making of the "Doc & Festus" film in the Brainerd, MN area. It took two weeks to make the film.

There were 131 legal muskies caught by chapter members in 1983 with 127 released for a release percentage of 97%.

At the December meeting, the following officers were elected to lead the chapter in 1984: Ed Jeffers, President; Jack Bergeman, First Vice President; Dan Pabst, Second Vice President; Barbara Bowlin, Secretary; Royal Bowlin, Assistant Secretary; Bob McTavish, Treasurer; Bob Buonincontro Assistant Secretary and Kermit Benson, Regional Vice President.

## 1984

The chapter started out the new year by enlisting some new blood on our chapter Board. They were: Gene Coyer, Terry Moulton, Mark Philips, Jan Ferguson and Gary Sly.

We also donated a Floy tagging gun and a supply of tags to our local DNR fish manager, to be used in research on the Chippewa and Flambeau river systems.

On January 21, 1984, Kermit Benson presented a paper he had prepared on the subject of acid rain, at an Acid Rain Workshop, at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. It was very well received and was published in several newspapers.

Our January meeting was attended by 37 members. It was decided that the chapter would donate \$200.00 to the Muskie Symposium in La Crosse We had already donated \$500.00, making our total contribution to the symposium \$700.00.

Our annual Awards Banquet was again held at the Elks Club in Eau Claire on February 4th. Jim Bunch did a super job as emcee at this event, which was attended by 104 chapter members. Frank Schneider Jr. of the Twin Cities Chapter gave us a dig about "importing help" from his chapter to win the '83 Challenge. Frank was referring to Willy Hable and Lowell Frank who had transferred from the Twin Cities Chapter to ours in order to fish the '83 Challenge. It was Willy's release of a 47+ inch, 35 pound muskie that put us on top in that Challenge. Willy was presented an award for it at this banquet.

Marcia Malone presented the Mike Malone Memorial Award to Willy La Bonte and Jim Bunch presented a service award to Kermit Benson.

In March our chapter donated \$200.00 to the Chippewa Rod & Gun Club for their fish crib project on Lake Wissota.

March 8 thru 11 we participated in the Wisconsin Indianhead's Spring Sport Show at London Square Mall, where as usual, we were the main attraction. We had five muskies in the over 30 pound class at our booth and two live muskies from our pond in an aquarium. We sold an average of 50 raffle tickets per hour at this show.

On March 24th we held a Spring Fishing Seminar at Pier 53, with 350 people in attendance. This, coupled with the raffle we had at the Mall, was by far the most profitable fund raiser by the chapter up till that time. Much credit should be given to Jim Bunch's leadership in these fund raisers. Jim's entrance to our chapters activities gave us new vigor and confidence. Steve Worrall was the featured speaker at this event and he really packed em' in.

In April, several of our members attended the Muskie Symposium in La Crosse - those who come to mind were Jim Bunch, Ken Imm, Jack Bergeman and their wives and Kermit Benson. We attended many of the technical sessions but the highlight of the entire event came at the Awards Banquet when Smoky Swenson of the Twin Cities Chapter gave the "Lunge Bucket" to Jim Bunch and Kermit Benson. We kept this coveted trophy in our display case at Pier 53 for the next year.

We had moved our chapter meetings to Pier 53 in '84.

In June of '84, we hosted Challenge '84 at the Chippewa Flowage. Joe Heil did a super job as Challenge Chairman. Our members caught several fish and for a time it looked like we would have a chance to win the Challenge again. But as the contest progressed, our luck seemed to peter out. The guides in the Hayward Lakes Chapter were just too much for us. But it was a fun time for all.

We made up for it in August, when many of us traveled back to Mylie's Place on Sabaskong Bay for a good fishing trip. Jim Coffin caught a 28 pounder which he released and we topped off that trip with five legal muskies in three hours up in Stony Portage Bay.

Verlin Eckwright did very well at home! He landed a 34 pound, 11 ounce muskie in the Chippewa River and topped that off with a 30 pound plus muskie the next weekend on Lake Holcombe.

Our chapter donated \$200 to a Canadian muskie research program in 1984.

On September 15th we attended a meeting of the Wisconsin Chapters of Muskies, Inc. at which tournament legislation was discussed and on September 19-20 we held our annual tournament in the Holcombe area.

Our 8th annual Wisconsin-National Musky Tournament had 193 contestants. The event was dampened by some foul weather but some nice fish were caught and a good time was had by all. Paul Michels of our chapter caught his first muskie - a 41 incher, which he released and on the very next consecutive cast he landed a 44 incher which he also released! How's that for history? The Weight Division was won by Leigh Borgwart with a 25 pounder. Duwane Dressel owner of The Big Minnow Sport Shop & Supper Club at Holcombe put on a free lunch for the gang after the awards ceremony. Paul Michels won the Release Division.

Jack Bergeman did a super job as Pond Chairman in '84. We harvested 3,265 fingerlings from the pond for a recovery of 47%. They averaged 16 inches in length. We stocked 1,989 fingerlings in Lake Wissota and 576 in Lake Holcombe. In addition, 700 fingerlings, many from 12 to 14 inches in length were transported from our pond to the Woodruff area to help fill DNR stocking quotas.

The chapter election for 1985 was held in November. It started out only as nominations but the nominations were all unopposed, so it became the election. Those elected were: Terry Moulton, President; Ed Jeffers, First Vice President; Paul Michels, Second Vice President Gene Coyer, Treasurer; Mark Adams, Assistant Treasurer, Barb Bowlin, Secretary (as usual); Royal Bowlin, Assistant Secretary and Kermit Benson, Regional Vice President.

The year 1984 ended with Jim Bunch tossing his hat in the ring as a candidate for At Large Director of the International. There were three Wisconsin members who had expressed some interest in running for At Large Director but the other two withdrew to support Jim's candidacy.

1985

In January of 1985, we introduced our new chapter newsletter, The Follow Up, edited by Ed Jeffers. Jim Bunch helped Ed get this off to a good start by selling 8 or 10 ads in just a matter of about an hour on the phone. We thought this would be an excellent way to keep chapter members informed about our activities and upcoming events. Also, by exchanging newsletters with other chapters, we, hope to improve communications.

One of our first issues of The Follow Up featured an article about our chapter's Morris Holeton who caught a 4 pound 12 ounce Smallmouth bass through the ice on December 10th 1984. The fish qualified as the Division IV Ice Fishing World Record Smallmouth.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Jack Bergeman, Ed Jeffers and Kermit Benson attended a meeting of the Wisconsin Chapters of Muskies, Inc. in Mosinee, WI where Jeff Thill of our chapter was awarded a trophy for winning the Junior Release Division Championship. Kermit was, once again, elected Chairman of the state organization.

On March 7th thru 10th we again participated in the Wisconsin Indianhead Association's Spring Sports Show at London Square Mall. About 25 chapter members helped with the three and a half day show. We were able to raise over \$1500.00 toward our Spring Seminar at this show by selling raffle tickets. We had quite a party in the London Lounge at the end of the show, having talked ourselves dry in our booth.

We had to postpone our March meeting because of a blizzard. When we held the meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup>, it was still snowing but to our surprise 50 members showed up - not bad for a chapter with less than 200 members. Even Norb Ruff, one of our charter members, showed up and it was nice to see him back.

Our Spring Fishing Seminar was held at Nelson Sports Center on March 15 & 16. This seminar featured two of the Worlds best walleye fishermen, Bob Probst and Mike McClelland. Speaking on river muskie fishing was Mike Cookas Muskie Release Champion in the State of Wisconsin for four consecutive years. The attendance at this seminar was down from what we expected but the raffle we had going with this seminar and our Mall show was profitable. Gene Coyer was in charge of concessions, which made a bundle for us. We wound up with a net profit of \$5,100.00.

At the March meeting of the International Board, Jim Bunch of our chapter was elected At Large Director. At the International Awards Banquet, Jeff Thill was awarded a trophy for first place in the Junior Release Division. Shawn Bergeman took third place in that division and Scott Foltz took seventh place. Jack Bergeman took eighth place in the Open Release Division. So our chapter members did pretty good in the International Fishing Contest in '85.

In May, we received a donation of \$1,200.00 from Budweiser to help with the cost of publishing our Follow Up. The G. Heileman Brewing Co. was offended because we accepted this donation from Budweiser and it ended our romance with Heileman's. However, Heileman's did continue to donate trophies for our State Fishing Contest.

In 1985, President Terry Moulton instigated our holding chapter meetings during the months of June, July and August at the Chippewa Rod & Gun Club on Lake Wissota. Short business meetings were followed by group fishing on the lake, after which we had brats and beer. This has worked out good and the turnout for these outdoor meetings has been good.

Outings were held at Potato Lake and Lake Holcombe in '85 and several of our members participated in the Gil Hamm Memorial Chapter Challenge on the Chippewa Flowage. Hayward Lakes again won that event.

We also had a good turnout for our annual Canadian fishing trip the first week of August. The highlite of that trip was Tom Smetana's release of a 51 inch muskie, the longest released fish in our chapter up till this time. Helping Tom with the catch was Paul Michels.

In September of '85, Kermit Benson was asked by our chapter to get involved in a fight to save the Chippewa River below Winter Dam on behalf of our chapter. The fight was over a hydro-electric facility being built at the Winter Dam in Sawyer County. The planned method of operation would have ruined the prime muskie fishery below the dam. Kermit put in many volunteer hours on this project. Our chapter spent \$500.00 on it and the International organization contributed \$ 500.00 toward legal fees. Our efforts paid off when the parties involved decided to augment the flow of water through the power plant to provide enough water in the river to protect the fishery.

Our rearing pond was harvested on August 29th 1985. We started out with 7,000 fingerlings about 1+ inches in length and harvested 3,106 averaging 9 inches in length. This was a recovery of 44.3%. The cost to the chapter per fish was \$0.54. We spent a total of \$1,705.00 on feed that year. The stocking of these fish was divided between Lake Wissota and Lake Holcombe.

Our 9th annual musky tournament was held September 20-22. Kevin Adams was Chairman. There were 45 legal muskies released in this tournament and 17 of them were over 40 inches in length. Sandra Olson of Eagan, MN. took first place in the Weight Division with a 50+ inch, 31 pound muskie - the only muskie kept in this tournament. The Release Division was won by Jeff Fransway with 59+ points.

The officers elected for 1986 were: Jack Bergeman, President; Terry Moulton, First Vice President; Gary Sly, Second Vice President; Cathy Johnson, Secretary; Barb Bowlin, Assistant Secretary; Gene Coyer, Treasurer; Bob Schuch, Assistant Treasurer and Kermit Benson, Regional Vice President. Eight new Board members were also elected.

## 1986

Our new President, Jack Bergeman, set a goal to double our membership in 1986. He was very busy the first month filling Chairmanships for our various committees.

On January 18th over 125 members and guests packed Pier 53 for our annual Awards Banquet. This event takes the place of our regular meeting in January. Guests at this event included Frank Schneider Jr., International Treasurer, and his wife June, Geoff Emerson and Doug Erickson of the DNR, Mr. & Mrs. Bob Marek owner of our pond and Dave Carlson, outdoor reporter for WEAU Television. Marcia Malone presented the Mike Malone Memorial Service Award to Jim Bunch who has done much to give our chapter financial stability. Large and beautiful trophies were presented to our lucky anglers and we all enjoyed the event. Some partied until 5:00 A.M.

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, as part of our annual Spring fund raiser, our members in the Barron, Rice Lake area were busy selling raffle tickets at the Red Cedar Mall in Rice Lake. Those taking part were: Morris Holeton, Manard Egstad, Tom Smetana, Lee Minnick, Al Widiker, Jim & Jeff Lavalieri, Scot Arnold, Lee McClain and Jan Ferguson. That's a pretty good sized contingent considering that Rice Lake is 60 miles from our immediate area.

Other shows worked by our members in '86 were at the Thunderbird Mall in Menomonie and the Vacation & Camping Show at London Square Mall in Eau Claire. Raffle tickets are sold at these shows in conjunction with our Spring Seminar.

The Spring Fishing Seminar was held at Pier 53 on April 19, 1986. Again, we had some real pros as speakers. This time it was Greg Bohn, a highly sought lecturer from Minocqua and Joe Bucher, Fishing Facts Editor and professional guide from the Boulder Junction area. The attendance at this event was disappointing but we turned the fund raiser into a success by selling about 9,000 raffle tickets.

Our May meeting was outstanding! International President, Keith Ogden was on hand to give us an excellent talk on fishing Lake of The Woods. The gang closed up Pier 53 at 2:00 A.M. and met again at the Big Steer for breakfast.

Our June, July and August meetings were again held outdoors at the Chippewa Rod & Gun Club. These meetings were all well attended and there were some nice fish caught. At the July meeting Chuck Sedivy released a 40+ incher and Jim Coffin released a 36 incher.

On July 30, 31 and August 1 we had two 6 man teams in Challenge '86 on Sabaskong Bay, Lake of the Woods, Ontario, Canada. We did not win the Challenge but we had 22 guys from our chapter up there at Mylie's Place and it was a most enjoyable week of fishing. Jim Coffin released a 48 incher and Bob Bunch from Flatlanders who was fishing with us, went home with a 30 pound plus fish. Lee McClaine boated a 50.25", 31 pound muskie.

Jim Bunch released a 48 incher on Lake Holcombe in July.

Our 10th annual Wisconsin-National Musky Tournament was held in the Holcombe area September 12-14. We had 144 contestants with 27 legal muskies being registered. All 27 were released! Dick Stelter won the Release Division with 21 points.

We had a disaster at our pond in 1986. On September 21 we had 5 inches of rain in two hours and our pond flooded out. On the 26th we had another 3 inches of rain and it flooded out a second time. We lost thousands of muskies. We wound up with 821 muskies, with an average length of 10 inches. Most of them were stocked in Lake Wissota.

We ended the year with close to 300 members in the chapter.

The following officers were elected for the new year: Dave Arbuckle, President; Royal Bowlin, First Vice President; Tom Smetana, Second Vice President; Kathy Johnson, Secretary; Barb Bowlin, Assistant Secretary; Gene Coyer, Treasurer; Bob Schuch, Assistant Treasurer and Ed Jeffers, Regional Vice President.

Well, the above is by no means my best writing job but that's the way it was and this brings us up to 1987.

Kermit