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## Lake Roosevelt Walleye Club by Susan Urhausen

The Lake Roosevelt Walleye Club has been in existence in Kettle Falls since 1995, sort of. The club was founded then, but it was known as the Kettle Falls Walleye Club. Because the members felt that the scope of the club was larger than Kettle Falls, it was renamed after Lake Roosevelt in 1998. The club was not originally responsible for the highly successful Washington State Governor's Cup Walleye Tournament, (a name that has been copyrighted), but they have been in charge of it since 1997. Still, it seems hard to separate the club from the tournament, so looking at the tournament first just makes sense.

When anyone in Kettle Falls thinks of the popular Governor's Cup tournament, the local Walleye Club automatically comes to mind. The fact that they did not create the tournament and that they came into existence a year following the first tourney came as a surprise to me. The Washington State Governor's Cup Walleye Tournament was the creation of Chris Sanders and the Kettle Falls Chamber of Commerce. That first year, there were 76 teams participating, a success by any standards. Compared to subsequent years, the scope of success for that first year holds out: In 2009, there were 88 teams. One year saw over 90 teams competing.

The local tournament was patterned after the Governor's Cup in Fort Peck, Montana. Competitors in that tournament have their fish measured out on the water on one of several official boats located around the lake. The Washington Governor's Cup used to do it that way, but after urging from Walleye Unlimited, a sports group that oversees fishing competitions, weighing the fish on land became the norm. In both cases, once the weighing and/or measuring has taken place and pictures have been taken, all walleye are released back into the water. During competition, the fish are held in live wells on the competitor's boats. For those unfamiliar with live wells, they are holding tanks usually below the deck of the boat that can be filled via a pump with water from the lake. They have an aerator that keeps enough oxygen in the water to keep the fish alive. This year, the weigh in will take place at Happy Dell Park in town. It is the hope of the club that by doing this, it will increase interest and community involvement in both the tournament and the club. There will be other activities besides the weigh in taking place.

The entry fee for the Washington State Governor's Cup Walleye Tournament is \$270.00 per team. Of that money, \$200.00 goes towards the prize money for the tournament, \$60.00 goes to the Walleye Club, and \$10.00 to Walleye Unlimited. The tournament pays to the top 10 places. There is also a \$100.00 optional pool that pays to such things as 'big stringer' or 'big fish'. This local tournament has gotten attention far beyond Stevens County. A video of a past tournament was posted online and is available through link from the Kettle Falls Focus web site, ([kettlefallsfocus.com](http://kettlefallsfocus.com)).

The Lake Roosevelt Walleye Club, as stated, has been around since 1995. It was registered that year with the State of Washington as a non-profit organization. Their mission statement reads:

*The mission of the Kettle Falls Walleye Club shall be to educate, encourage and stimulate interest in angling for walleye and other spiny-ray species; to seek cooperation with all other organizations or agencies with similar objectives. Encourage observances and enforcement of game laws, encourage the conservation of all fishes and fight pollution in all waters.*

The membership has fluctuated since then like most clubs, having had as many as 67 members down to less than 20. Currently they have 43 members. They used to have members from the Spokane Walleye Club and vice versa. Jim Nance, one of the members present for this interview is the 'oldest' member, that is to say, he has been a member for the longest time from among the current members.

Most members come to join the club by word of mouth, or by their love for the sport of fishing. Club membership fees are \$20.00 annually. They are not individual memberships, they are family

memberships. The Walleye Club holds their meetings monthly on the second Thursday at 7 PM at the Senior Center in Kettle Falls, located at 6<sup>th</sup> and Narcissus. Each meeting has planned activities; seminars, speakers, demonstrations and door prizes. One does not have to own a boat or even fish to become a member. Anyone who is interested in fishing or wanting to learn is encouraged to join.

The funds collected either via membership fees or via their cut of each tourney entry fee are used for various donations. In the past, there have been donations to the Kettle Falls Youth Center and the Kettle Falls Food Bank. Larger donations have gone to the EMT's/first responders in Stevens and Ferry Counties, and to help 4-H build a dock at Lake Thomas. The club got an award from the state on that one. This year, some of the proceeds are going towards improvements on the gazebo at Happy Dell Park. Two years ago, the entire proceeds from that tourney went to Casey McKern, a local young man who suffered a serious neck injury. Another fishing tournament has come about in his name, the Ball & Chain Fishing Tournament.

In the past, in conjunction with the Spokane Walleye Club and the Shiner's, disabled children and their parents/guardians were taken out for a day of fishing. These usually took place at either Deer Lake or Waitts Lake. The children not only got to enjoy a day out fishing, but got to keep a hat, t-shirt and tackle box, not to mention whatever fish they caught. This was a program that was started by Jim Owens from Seattle. There also used to be a casting contest at Lake Ellen yearly partnered with the Forest Service, with a breakfast as well.

During one of the Governor's Cups, Professor Schultz, a biologist contacted the club about partnering with them to do some research. Students of the Professor were in the 'weigh' boats with the club members. When the competitors brought their catch up to the boats for measuring, the students took vital statistics on the fish, tagged them and released them.

Every effort is being made by the Lake Roosevelt Walleye Club to make things good for all during the Governor's Cup. There has been an issue with parking at the Marina that they are trying to alleviate by running at least three shuttles to move competitors back and forth, leaving their vehicles and trailers elsewhere. This frees up space at the Marina for non-competitors who are out pleasure boating on the same weekend. The club is constantly working to come up with new and different ideas to make things better not just for the anglers who compete, but the residents of Kettle Falls and the pleasure boaters who share the lake during the Governor's Cup and other tourneys. They rely on continuing community partnerships; the Park Service, the Forest Service, local businesses and sponsors of the Governor's Cup.

I had long wished to see a fish fry for the community with Walleye from Lake Roosevelt, which the club was good enough to look into. The health regulations for such an event are prohibitive for now as to how the fish would have to be handled from start to finish. They do welcome new and different ideas, though.

They do not currently have a web site for either the Lake Roosevelt Walleye Club or the Washington State Governor's Cup Walleye Tournament. It is being looked into.

Again, meetings are the second Thursday of each month at 7 PM at the Senior Center in Kettle Falls. Current officers are President Bobby Nesland, VP Jim Meskan, Treasurer Willie Martin, Secretary Jim Tharp, and Tournament Director Marty Martin. They are a nice group of people. Go to a meeting and get to know them and all about the Walleye, a spiny-ray species, who knew?