

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN!

Anglers enjoy spirited competition in LBI's 56th Annual Surf Fishing Classic

By SUSAN BLOOM/Correspondent

Anglers, take note!

If you're a fishing enthusiast, the 56th annual LBI Surf Fishing Classic is under way and promises yet another year of memorable surf action, camaraderie and competition.

First started in 1954 and now one of the East Coast's longest-running fishing contests, according to a news release from the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce, the 2010 LBI Surf Fishing Classic began on Oct. 9 and runs until Dec. 5, during which time more than 800 registrants will compete to catch the largest striped bass or bluefish to win a variety of daily, biweekly or grand prizes.

Throughout the eight-week contest, participants can fish 24/7 and are limited to fishing only from the surf and to catching no more than two bass and two bluefish per day.

The main prizes pay \$1,000 each for the heaviest bluefish and the heaviest bass caught, but prizes also are offered for the heaviest fish caught daily (\$35) and the heaviest fish caught during each of four two-week segments in the derby (\$400); additional prizes are offered for ladies, students and seniors entering the heaviest of each species.

"Fall is a migratory time for these fish, so people would be fishing anyway," explains Michele Cuff, office manager for the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce and administrator of the LBI Surf Fishing Classic for the past 30 years. "The added competitive element just adds some spice to the mix."

The original objective of the fishing derby was to help extend the season

on LBI and boost tourism, which it has certainly accomplished, as anglers come from as far as North Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware to participate, often staying in area hotels or renting houses on LBI for the eight-week period.

But the competition has done more than just help support local businesses, says Margaret O'Brien, owner of Beach Haven-based Jingles Bait & Tackle, one of five official locations where participants can register and weigh in their fish daily.

"There are so many great memories associated with the fishing classic," she explains.

O'Brien, a native of LBI and a participant in the competition since 1966 (currently one of 22 women registered in 2010), she has seen several generations fish in the derby through the years and recalls with pride the image of a 3-year-old boy in 2009 who entered a 10-pound fish that was practically bigger than he was.

"You make a lot of good friends in the fishing classic," she says. "Though some of the rules of the competition and some of the fishing methods have changed over time, one thing that hasn't changed is the bond between surf fishermen and the way they all care about and help one another."

Sponsored by American Fishing Wire, The Fisherman Magazine and Hi-Seas, LBI's 2010 Surf Fishing Classic is in full swing. Supported by many businesses throughout town and donating some of the registration fees collected toward scholarships for area high school students, there is much

more to this derby than just the rod and reel.

"Many people love to fish at this time of year, and they enjoy the competition and the camaraderie. And in turn, LBI appreciates the activity and truly wants to give back to these fishermen," O'Brien said.

Registration for the fishing classic is \$30. For more information, visit www.lbift.com or call the chamber of commerce at 609-494-7211.

Ed McGlynn, 80, of Beach Haven proves that there is no age limit on successful angling.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
In 2009, then 3-year-old Kevin Schuler of Brant Beach poses with his 10-pound catch.
Forty-seven years ago, James Warner poses with his winning fish. Weighing in at 56 pounds, 7 ounces, Brant Beach resident Ray Sullivan's striped bass, caught on Oct. 21, might just be this year's fish to beat.

Tools of the trade for anglers.
 (PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND JINGLES BAIT & TACKLE SHOP, BEACH HAVEN)

