

## A short history of PWWTU's participation in the Allegheny Outdoor Sport and Travel Show 2013-2019

By Ron Milavec

For at least the last seven years, Penn's Woods West has had a booth at the Allegheny Outdoor Sport & Travel Show at the Monroeville Convention Center. Here, Rich Simmen and Sam Bacco talk to a perspective fly buyer – Feb 2017.



A little history: In 2012, our chapter was contacted by the show manager, Chris Fassnacht of Expositions, Inc., and he offered us a booth if we would provide a presentation to be included in the show's program. Our first appearance was in 2013 and Ken Crawford coordinated booth activities. Ken and I thought that having a presence at this show would be a good way to promote Trout Unlimited, our chapter, membership, programs and projects.

Ken gave an audio/visual presentation that first year, and Brigit Shields and I each gave presentation

in 2014. Here I explain the intricacies of catching the wiley steelhead with a fly rod:



In late 2014, Ken asked me if I would be willing to oversee the booth. Since then, Dale Fogg, Christian Shane, Brigit Shields, and I have given presentations. There were a couple years when Chris did not have a presentation slot for us, but still offered the booth to our chapter. At first, the show lasted five days (Wednesday to Sun) and in 2017, it was cut to three days (Fri to Sun) due to low attendance earlier in the week.

Having a booth at the show allowed us to contact the public and promote a number of issues close to the heart of PWWTU:

- Chapter meetings, which are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month, Sep thru May;

- Cabin Fever, our annual Fly Fishing Expo, usually held at the Doubletree in Cranberry in late February or early March.
- Our Women's Initiative, their functions and outings;
- Our 1 day free Fly Fishing Seminar taught by Rob Reeder, Scott Loughner and others, usually occurs the end of March or early April
- Conservation issues and stream projects;
- BarFlies, our informal fly tying session held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of the month, Sep thru Apr;
- Pass out brochures for Casting For Recovery (CFR);
- The Fly Fishing Film
- Project Healing Waters (PHW), handout a brochure and talk about eligibility and activities.

The highlight for me at the 2018 Expo was meeting Tim Schaeffer, the new Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boating Commission (PFBC). He assumed his duties on November 13, 2018, replacing John Arway, who retired on November 2, 2018. Mr. Schaeffer, along with several other members of the PFBC, held a 'Meet & Greet / Question & Answer' session at the show. I attended the session and my impression of him is that he is an energetic, forward looking individual who has the interests of the fishing public and PFBC at heart. Discussed (with an emphasis on SW Pa) were: PFBC funding issues (currently being considered by the legislature); Accomplishments in the

last year; Maintenance and dam repair issues; Projects in progress; Wish list projects on hold primarily due to a lack of funding.

Mr. Schaeffer, along with WCO Mike Johnson (Central Allegheny) stopped by to meet our booth volunteers.



Attendance at the shows has gone down from year to year. You no longer get the elbow-to-elbow crowds. Show's opening and 4:00 until 6:00 are the busiest each day. There was good interest in Cabin Fever and the Free Fly Fishing Seminar, and we handed out many flyers for each. We talked to many parents and their children. I had my tying vise and had a lot of interest from the younger ones. They were thrilled when I would give them a fly that I had just tied.

On the last day of the 2019 show, only nine fly boxes remained on our PWWTU table from our Great Fly Sale. Another attendee considered buying three boxes, and I said to him: "For \$20, you can have all

nine.” He put a \$20 bill on the table and we were **SOLD OUT**

Thanks to everyone for help with staffing the booth and making our effort a success: Rich Simmen, Tom Walsh, Brigit Shields, Doug Beck, Ken Buettner, Dave Fogg, Joe Birsa, Mary Ann Birsa and Josh Weiland. Besides myself, Joe, Mary Ann and Doug brought their vises and materials.

Mary Ann had many people stopping to watch her tie flies which gave her the opportunity to promote our Woman’s Initiative.



L to R – Mary Ann Birsa, Joe Birsa, Ron Milavec – Feb 2019

This year, 2019, I dedicated our effort to the memory of Rich Yurko who passed away in the summer of 2018. He helped us staff the booth every year and would do a shift every day of the show. I try to get two volunteers, in addition to myself, for each 3-4 hour shift but had a couple of unfilled slots this year. When there were only two of us in the booth, Brigit and I said that the empty chair was there for Rich.



L to R – Rich Yurko, Brigit Shields, Ron Milavec – Feb 2017

For more information contact: Ron Milavec, PWWTU Board member in charge of the Sportsman show booth and Bar Flies ([Click here](#) for more information on our fly tying class.)

[rmilavec@comcast.net](mailto:rmilavec@comcast.net)