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Sports

Tuesday, July 17, 2007

Fishing for business



Denton Record-Chronicle/Al Key

Tim Wike began a second career recently as a fishing guide on Lake Ray Roberts, where he has been fishing for years. Wike, shown in his bass boat Monday on the lake, has dealt with a variety of obstacles since starting his business, including the recent flooding in the area.

Wike settles into career as fishing guide

By Todd Jorgenson
 Sports Editor

SANGER — Tim Wike figures if his brand new fishing guide business can survive the past six months, it can thrive through just about anything.

Outdoors

The Denton resident began a second career as a bass fishing expert on Lake Ray Roberts in December, just about the time Mother Nature started wreaking havoc on area anglers.

From the chilly winter drought to the unprecedented summer floods, Wike hasn't exactly had it easy during his first few months as an entrepreneur.

"The weather man didn't cooperate with us, but that's fine," said Wike, who owns and operates Reelin' Ray Roberts Guide Service.



Denton Record-Chronicle/Al Key

Local fishing guide Tim Wike holds up a bass he caught Monday on Lake Ray Roberts.

Wike, 58, decided late last year to retire from Kroger, where he worked for the past four decades. He spent 36 of those years in store management, and most of those at the supermarket chain's various Denton locations.

A fishing aficionado for many years, Wike moved to Denton in 1990, the same year that Ray Roberts opened.

"I've been fishing it from Day 1," he said.

After learning almost every nook and cranny of the lake, both above and below the surface, Wike gave some thought to starting a fishing-guide business on the lake after his retirement. For the outgoing Wike, it was an ideal marriage of hobby and business.

"My wife said I was too young to just go fishing every day," Wike said. "It's my relief from the hustle and bustle of the grocery business."

Wike used to fish Ray Roberts about one or two times each week, plus most of his vacation time. These days, he's on the lake almost every day.

His business has remained steady despite the weather, which lowered water temperatures unseasonably during the winter, and now has water levels more than 7 feet higher than usual. Now, anglers are fishing areas that used to be on land.

"It really spreads the fish out. They've got a lot more places to hide," Wike said. "Those fish are in places they've never

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been before. It's like everybody's fishing a brand new lake."

The flooding recently prompted state officials to close all boat ramps at the lake until the water levels subside. All day-use areas at the two segments of Ray Roberts State Park likewise are shut down because of severe flooding, and will remain that way for another several weeks. Beaches, piers and picnic pavilions are almost completely submerged.

The only motorized boats allowed on the lake currently are

those already docked at the Ray Roberts Marina, reducing recreational activity at Ray Roberts to an almost eerie silence even in the prime of summer.

"This time of the year, there's [usually] significant boat traffic on the lake," said Chris True, Ray Roberts State Park superintendent. "Obviously, our visitation is going to be way down."

True said that the flooding could have long-term benefits to fishing on the lake. Newly flooded vegetation increases the food available to fish, which should

have a positive impact on the survival rates of this year's spawn.

He added that although the rains have subsided for the time being, the state park facilities will not reopen until at least August, when a sufficient amount of drainage brings the water levels back under control. That's assuming, of course, that the weather cooperates.

"We want to get the facility back open just as soon as it's safe to do so," True said. "We're at Mother Nature's mercy."

Wike expects to start booking more trips as the weather continues to improve. The quality of fishing at Ray Roberts has been strong, he said, even though few people would know it.

The unpredictability of bass fishing — whether largemouth bass or sand bass — can make it especially rewarding or frustrating, Wike said. However, he said bass fishing has been solid all summer, with the extra underwater vegetation offering new hiding spots but also making the species more pre-

dictable.

His transition from fishing hobbyist to businessman has been smooth. Though Ray Roberts has several fishing guide services with various specialties, he said he has found an appetite among inexperienced fishermen, or families with young children wanting to learn the sport for the first time.

Wike enjoys the teaching aspect of his job, and makes guarantees to customers about catching fish on a half-day or full-day trip, even though the

fish haven't always been biting. Yet he said his high success rate has started to lure repeat business.

"I've been in customer service all my life, so when I bring people out here, I'll do everything I can to make sure they have a good time," Wike said. "I've had nothing but good experiences."

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