

Your Prescription for better health – Fishing in Western NY

By Bill Hilts, Jr.

We all know that the freshwater fishery in Western New York is a world class act, offering some of the best angling action in the world for a wide range of species that few destinations can compare with. This is one of the reasons why we host the Greater Niagara Fishing Expo year after year. We are “Teaching Fishing” to the masses, helping them all to become better anglers in the long run of life. One huge side benefit is that the art of fishing is better for your health – for so many reasons.

The act of fishing and reeling them in is a documented therapy, something that can make a life-changing difference. Just ask Capt. Ned Librock with Catching Dreams Charters, one of the exhibitors at the Expo. Since the formation of Catching Dreams Charters, Inc. in 2015, after being recognized as an important therapy for pediatric cancer patients, the 501 (c)(3) not for profit organization continues to expand its reach across the Empire State and beyond.

“We’ve made some excellent progress in the last 12 months,” said Capt. Ned Librock. “Seeing children deal with cancer is heart-breaking and if we can help them take their mind off of the unfair situation that they have been dealt, we can help them receive a little bit of normalcy and quality of life.” Fishing is the therapy that makes a huge difference in their lives.

Dr. John Syracuse of Newfane takes that a step further. “Fishing is an excellent coping mechanism, an emotional therapy that can help anyone who might have some type of terminal illness,” says Syracuse, an avid angler. “The sheer enjoyment of being outdoors, the anticipation of the catch, and reeling a fish in all adds to the adventure and give people a feeling of well being few activities can give them.”

Youth Movement

Getting kids out fishing is an important pastime that they will be able to enjoy for the rest of their lives. It can allow for some important bonding to take place between parents and grandparents. It can help to build a person’s self-confidence and give them a feeling of accomplishment as they build a foundation of life’s lessons.

Knowing the proper steps to be a successful fisherperson is important, which is why the Great Niagara Fishing Expo holds a Youth Fishing Clinic on Sunday morning at the Convention Center. You must register in advance. Check out the details at www.niagarafishingexpo.com and sign yourself up.

Physical and Mental Health Benefits

Go fish! That popular card game for kids (and adults) should be a mantra for all to follow. According to Richard Louv, noted author who termed the “catch” phrase “nature deficit disorder,” he has documented that it’s important for the next generation to be outdoors. Not only does it have physical benefits, but it has mental benefits as well. Children need to spend more time outdoors and it might as well start with fishing.

“Motor dexterity is important when fishing and these kinds of activities are good for kids,” says Dr. John Syracuse. “Hand-eye coordination is important, and brain impulses help to figure out what needs to be done. The physical activity of getting to the place you are going to fish can be a good work out for you. The resistance created by the fish fighting can also aid in giving you a workout, especially if you are reeling in a fish that is much bigger – as I often do.” Then again, exercising your imagination is also important.

A Quiet Place

Emotional health is important, and it can all start just being outdoors in peace and quiet with a rod and reel in your hand. Unplug yourself from society and relieve some of that tension that has been built up from school, work, politics, or whatever path life has taken you down.

Western NY offers many places that can help get you away from it all. Grab a kayak and paddle your way up any of the Great Lakes tributaries, the Erie Canal, or inland lake. The Niagara Gorge offers a combination fishing/hiking opportunity that is second to none. It’s not hard to get away from it all.

Find out where some of these secluded secret spots are located by attending the Greater Niagara Expo Feb. 19-22, 2026 at the Niagara Falls Convention Center.