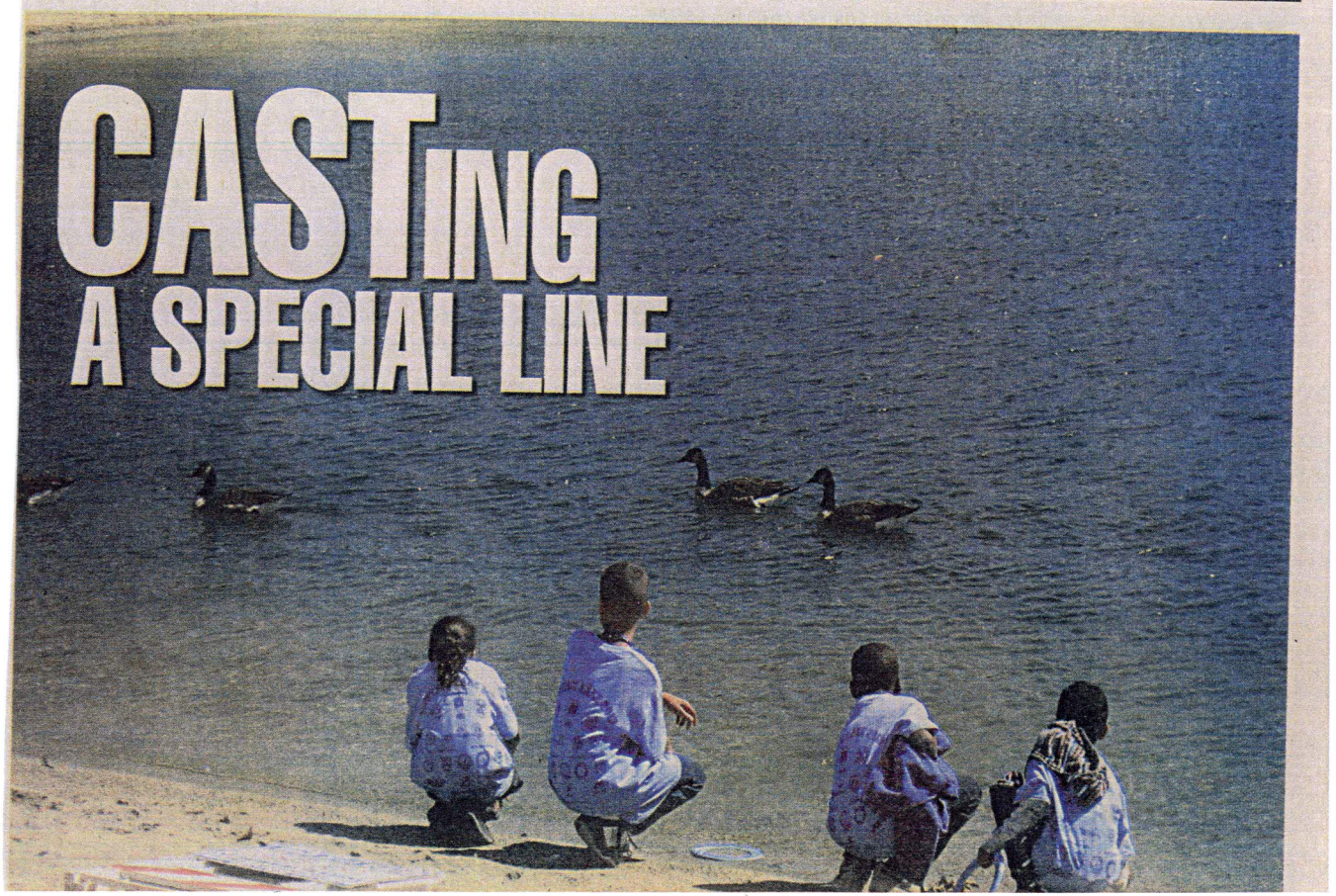
CASTING A SPECIAL LINE



Castaic Lake hosts fishing event for special-needs children

Written and Photographed by **ALAN HENDRY** ■ Valley Press Staff Writer

CASTAIC — There were dozens of anglers with fishing poles in their hands on the water of Castaic Lake, but the primary goal was not catching fish.

There weren't many fish caught on the windy Saturday morning, but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the 37 guests of honor at the Catch A Special Thrill fishing event for disabled/disadvantaged youth.

"You don't have to catch a fish," said Castaic resident Steve Hautin, who took out two kids and their mother on his boat on Oct. 5. It's just extra. A little nibble here, a nibble there is all it takes.

"They had a great time. They start out afraid of water and afraid of the boat. I'm making sure they have a great time."

Hayutin has also been involved in the event for 10 years after 40 years of fishing at Castaic Lake, initially going to the lake with his father.

Hayutin took out two kids and their mothers on his boat and they all came up empty.

The annual event drew more than 115 volunteers, including fishermen who brought 26 boats to the lake.

C.A.S.T. was started in 1991 and now holds 52 events a year across the country.

Among the volunteers on Oct. 5 were members of the Friends of Castaic and the Coast Guard Reserve.

"The boaters, they come from all around the area," said Art Pasley, the national program director for C.A.S.T. "A lot of these fishing clubs do some kind of youth activity. For this, they don't have to do anything but show up.

"A lot of this is an educational experience. They learn fishing, conservation. They establish new friends."

Each participant, as well as the captain of the boat they rode on, received a plaque with their photo on it.

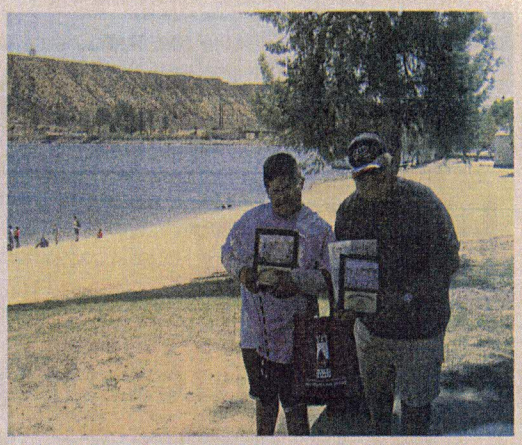
"They're all winners," Pasley said. "Most of them will go for the boat ride anyway. It's just fun."

Northridge resident Mark Torres took his 13-year-old son Dominic to the event for the fifth time after learning about C.A.S.T. through the Down Syndrome Association of Los Angeles.

Torres said his son is involved several different activities, such as Challenger Baseball, AYSO, a special needs Scout group and the Special Olympics, but fishing was new to both of them.

"Fishing is something I didn't do," Torres said. "At first he was afraid of getting into the boat. He's now confident in the boat."

Dominic liked putting worms on the hook and the fishing pole he received.



Above: Several of the children who participated in the Catch A Special Thrill fishing event at Castaic Lake on Oct. 5 ended the afternoon by watching ducks on the water. Clockwise from above left: A young angler wasn't thrilled about holding a bass with his boat captain. Dominic Torres (left) holds a plaque with his fishing partner Captain Louis. Children try to throw discs into the mouth of a bass. The captains who brought their boats to the annual C.A.S.T. event pose for a group photo.

Upcoming C.A.S.T. event

Oct. 19 at Silverwood Lake*

* - Boaters are needed.

To learn more about the program or to volunteer or participate, visit *www.castforkids.org* or *www.water.ca.gov/cast.*

Dominic also liked the barbecue at the end of the event, as did everyone else involved.

After everyone was finished with their hamburgers and hot dogs, event organizers took group photos and awarded the plaques to the participants and the captains who escorted them out onto the water.

"We've been with the same captain four times," Torres said.

A few of Dominic's teammates from his AYSO team learned about the event through Dominic and were newcomers to C.A.S.T.

"He gets to keep a plaque at the end and he looks forward to it," Torres said. "He's got friends here. It's a safe, learning environment for the kids. Everyone associated with it is very understanding."

One of the kids Hayutin took out on the boat was a return customer. It was the fourth time Hayutin had taken the boy out on his boat.

"I want to make the kids happy," Hayutin said. "Seeing the smile on their face, especially those kids that are special needs."

Hayutin said the experience may help a shy or withdrawn child to open up more.

"You just want to help them to open up and be open to new experiences and see what life has to offer," Hayutin said.

Palmdale resident Felicia Parker brought her kids to the event for the fourth time after initially learning about it through a friend.

Her kids — Ryan (14), Jeriah (15) and Taliyah (9) — fished for the first time at the event.

"They learn a lot of things," Parker said. "How to put a worm on a hook. It's just a good experience. They get a fishing rod and a tackle case."

All three of Parker's daughters liked fishing, even though none of them caught anything that Saturday morning.

Taliyah didn't even mind hooking a worm on her line.

"I haven't caught any," Jeriah said. "One got away last year."

Castaic resident David Durant took three kids and their dad out on his boat after arriving at 6 a.m.

"It was excellent," Durant said. "We didn't catch any fish, but had a good time."

Durant has been volunteering at the event for 10 years and initially wanted to introduce kids to fishing.

"Seeing the look on their face," Durant said of a kid catching a fish. "It's very rewarding."

Pasley said being involved with the program is his way of giving back to the sport of angling. Pasley was inducted into the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame in 2006.

"My entire life I've been involved with fishing," Pasley said. "It's something I've always done, been involved in youth programs from the start. My son and daughter have been out on the water.

"It's not about taking, you have to give a little. The kids and the family, they pay you back. You have to give back. It's a fun day for everybody. It's making sure the kids are having a good time."

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