

ALL ABOUT TROUT

Spring in Kalkaska is tale of fish

BY DANA GEORGE

Special to the Record-Eagle

KALKASKA — Kalkaska has a lot going for it: blueberries galore, the National Women's Bear Hunt, and miles of groomed snowmobile trails.

But the trout says it all.

The jewel in Kalkaska's crown is surely its abundance of trout waters. With

more than 275 miles of trout streams and 85 lakes in the county, Kalkaska County's trout are ripe for the picking.

And ripe for the celebrating, it seems. For the past 68 years, folks have gotten together to enjoy the annual National Trout Festival, held in late April every year.

Signifying the importance

is a 600-pound trout statue that has stood at the center of town for 40 years. Standing at 11 feet tall, it's a landmark for visitors and a familiar sight to residents.

The statue was away for the winter getting repainted and refurbished. Work finished about a month ago, when it was returned to the fountain where it rests.

That was just in time for the Trout Festival, the biggest event of the year.

"We open on the first day of trout season," said Larry See, festival chairman. "So the weather is always a bit of a surprise. One year we had the parade in 70-degree weather and the next year we had 50 degrees."

With an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 attendees, the festival's financial impact on the community cannot be underestimated.

"All the businesses in town appreciate the spike in business," See said. "They really gear up for the event."

It's not just fishing and outdoor stores seeing the benefits. It's also the pizza



Record-Eagle/John Russell

The newly refurbished National Trout Memorial is back in place in the center of Kalkaska.

parlors and gift shops, motels and gas stations.


While See has only lived in Kalkaska for seven years, he became involved in the

Trout Festival five years ago.

"I was part of the Kiwanis when I heard that they were looking for someone to take over the parade. I offered to do it. I'd never even seen the Trout Festival parade," See said.

Still, he enjoyed the experience. Despite a busy job with the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, See has made time to participate each year. He thinks the payoff of planning a great festival is seeing how the community responds.

"I think a community likes to feel ownership of an event like this," See said. "They like the pride of knowing this is our event, the only one in the country as far as we know."



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