

OutdoorScene

by Julius Knebel

A Final Fling?

For the past 25 years the Rockport/Fulton Chamber of Commerce has hosted "Spring Fling" for the Texas Outdoor Writers better known as TOWA. The idea was conceived in 1985 when Allen Rae Moers was president of the Chamber.

Many of the first participants are no longer alive like Dan Klepper of the San Antonio Express, Bob Brister of the Houston Chronicle, Paul Hope of Texas Parks & Wildlife, and Charlie McTee of the Texas Wildlife Association. As a lifetime member of TOWA, I have attended Spring Flings since 1995.

During that time the motels take turns bedding us, the restaurants feed us, and the guides fish us. The result is that this section of the mid-coast attracts more saltwater anglers than any other place in the state.

Rockport - Charm of the Coast

Rockport guides have a choice of fishing Aransas, Redfish, St. Charles, Copano, or San Antonio Bay. The longest lighted fishing pier in Texas (the old causeway) parallels the new one over Copano Bay, and kayakers find easy access to skinny waters fishing the inland lakes on San Jose Island or the marshes of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

However, fishing isn't the only outdoor activity for which Rockport is famous. It's also considered one of the most visited birding sites in North America since its located just minutes from the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge - home of the endangered Whooping Crains. The Rockport area is also home to many other shore birds while the wooded areas on Lamar Peninsula are the spring

destination of a variety of other bird species.

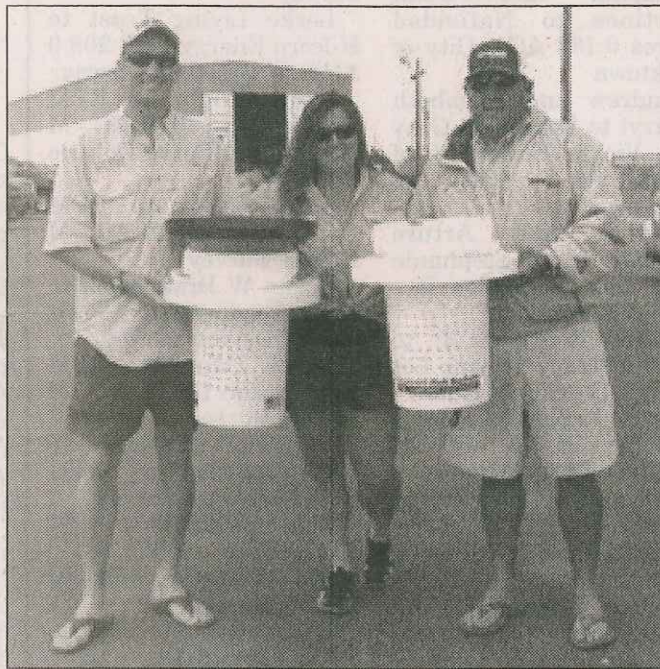
The golf course at the Rockport Country Club is considered one of the top 50 in the state; and thanks to an incredible Chamber of Commerce, year around activities attract artists, gourmet cooks, wine tasters, and historians to the many festivals held each season of the year.

Summer and fall activities include the Annual Tour of Homes and Fulton Mansion April 14-15, Nautical Flea Market May 1-2, Babes on the Bay fishing tournament for women May 7-8, Hidden Gardens Tour of Homes by master gardeners May 8, Festival of Wines May 29-30, 4-H Club Wild Game Dinner June 5, Rockport Art Festival July 3-4, Patriotic Boat Parade and Fireworks July 4, the famous Hummer/Bird Celebration Sept. 16-19, and Rockport Seafair with food fresh from the bays Oct. 8-10. For more details contact the Rockport/Fulton Chamber at 1-800-242-0071.

A Wife's Advice

This year the conditions for Spring Fling on April 18-19 couldn't have been better. The sun and wildflowers were out, there was very little wind, and the water was clear and calm. I told my wife of 56 years, who also is my best friend and most truthful critic, to enjoy it since this would probably be my "last fling". To which she replied, "stop talking like that. Let God make that decision. Quit thinking about how old you are. Your writing skills are as good as ever. Just slow down and don't try to limit out every time you go hunting and fishing. Take time to enjoy the wildflowers and listen to the birds sing."

The Longest Active Guide



Trevor and Amy Allen display their new style bait & fish buckets to Bink Grimes (right) at Rockport's Spring Fling. (Record photo)

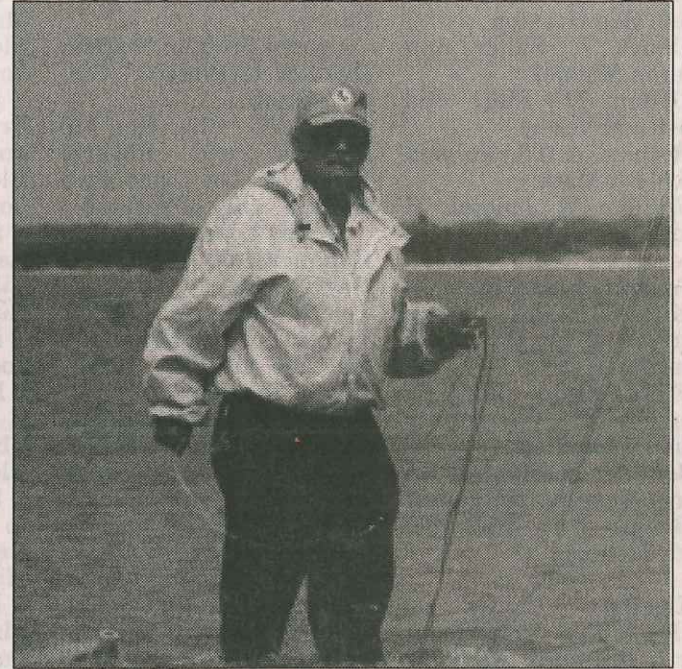
With all this talk about age, I suppose it was appropriate that I was chosen to fish with the longest active guide in Rockport - Charlie Newton of Redfish Charters 1-361-7298220. Charlie who has been guiding for the past 25 years has taught many of the younger guides where and when to fish and is now teaching his grandchildren how to catch fish. His specialty is catching red drum on live bait since he enjoys catching big fish that put up a fight. But his real love is taking out kids and others who have never fished before and see the thrill that comes when they hook up with a big one.

My fishing partners were Bink Grimes who writes for the Victoria Advocate and Houston Chronicle and a young couple from Austin - Trevor and Amy Allen who have invented a new cast net bait bucket and Shark-Off fish bucket.

It can be purchased at

the Tackle Box in Victoria as well as other locations in Rockport, Port Aransas, and Houston.

How many times have you been wade fishing and lost your bait because it either slipped out of your fingers or swam out of your bucket when emptying a cast net? Well their design prevents this because of its funnel construction. Also, how many times have you lost fish on a stringer due to a hungry shark. Their floating fish bucket prevents this. Both



Longest active guide Charlie Newton prefers to catch his own live bait with a cast net. (Record photo)

can be ordered by calling 512-299-5903 or www.LanKatOutdoorProducts.com.

A Fling To Remember

Our welcome meal was a gourmet seafood dinner at the Rockport Country Club; breakfast was at an old favorite Chalotte Plummer's; and the final evening meal by tradition was held at the Boiling Pot.

We wound up having so much fun that we decided to stay another two days at the Pelican Bay Resort 1-

866-729-7177. These colorful cabins among the leaning oakes are located just past the airport on the left side of the road as you approach Rockport on Hwy. 35 from the north. The owner Laura Denham grants her guests access to eat and play golf at the Rockport Country Club at a reduced green fee rate. So once again my wife was right. I will let God decide if his was my last Spring Fling.