14th Annual First Cast, MSA – "Passing The Baton After Seventeen Years"

This year's First Cast, MSA, conducted weekend of June 27th and 28th, marked the fourteenth session this free program has been run since its founding seventeen years ago, 2009. In partnership with the Atlantic Salmon Museum, free to the public, First Cast has proven to be a popular way for pairs interested in starting or reinforcing connections to conservation and the natural habitat of Atlantic salmon, while engaging in fly fishing. The pairing approach makes for buddies to induce each other to return to the river, so we, hopefully, develop future visits to our beloved Miramichi from our attendees.

This year's happy group of twenty proved to be particularly heartwarming to program's founder, Paul Valeri, as it included attendees from wide and varied parts of New Brunswick, all clearly eager to engage. In 2009, MSA was sanctioned by Trout Unlimited to fashion our own version of First Cast, patterned off its basic objectives and values. Those being:

(1) To inspire youth to connect with nature through fly fishing.
(2) To teach essential fly fishing skills, fostering confidence in participants.
(3) To instill a sense of responsibility for aquatic ecosystems and promote conservation efforts.
(4) To encourage camaraderie among participants, fostering supportive energy for returning visitations to the Miramichi.
(5) To emphasize the importance of protecting fish habitats.
(6) And INCLUSIVITY, making fly fishing accessible to all youth, regardless of background or experience.

Only missing running the time of covid, Miramichi Salmon Association's First Cast version has reliably functioned well. The weekend commences at Atlantic Salmon Museum Saturday morning, where its monitor gets eager attendees excited about the full experience of fly fishing Atlantic salmon. We have persisted to encourage repeated presence on the Miramichi, be it to fly fish, or merely, to frequently show up and be at one with the river! Our mantra has been that the most successful fly fishing experience for Atlantic salmon 80% of the time has little to do with the actual catching of fish, and so much more with appreciating the little things we experience by becoming at one with the river's environment. Those pure joys have unlimited options, maybe to be just losing one's self in observation of clouds, of passing birds, of interesting shore rocks, or by simply feeling the welcome touch of river current against our waders; that always, for certain! We don't want to forget to induce our young buddies to join us in fly fishing perhaps by promising an ice cream or a camp fire along the way! My father was big on doing that. It worked! Building true camaraderie, coming and going to the river, is always the name of the game.

Following monitor's presentation, tour by museum staff, and delicious lunch prepared by museum hosts, we capture sound basics for casting, by viewing parts of the video, "Joan Wulff's Dynamics of Fly Casting". So grateful to have had Saturday afternoons every year since 2009 of having had our own museum hall-of-famer, Vince Swazey, conduct actual one-on-one fly fishing instructions for each attendee in the home pool behind the Museum. This year monitor was proud to have the support of his son, avid fly fisher, Mark Valeri, performing that task.

Early Sunday morning, the proven routine has been all departing by caravan from Irving in Blackville for actual experience fishing a private camp. Years ago, that was at Valeri's camp in Gray Rapids, while the last ten times have been at Dewey Gillespie's in Blackville. Valued volunteer, Kirk Smith, provided patient guidance along the shore, while monitor moved up and down working with each attendee on their casting. Jeff Russell continued to do a fantastic job in keeping the event strongly synchronized with full fishing equipment, and superb Sunday barbeque once again served free to all attendees.

What made this year's First Cast, MSA so truly special was having Dewey's nephew, Museum Board Trustee, and past First Cast's museum tour guide, Austin Gillespie, shadow and participate most ably in the operation of this year's First Cast weekend. We are so happy to announce that Austin has agreed to take over from Paul Valeri in being Monitor for First Cast, MSA 2027. We are in able hands having Austin take over, and, most importantly, we are committed in insuring MSA's full continued support to stay in close communion with the Atlantic Salmon Museum to see to it that First Cast, MSA continues to flourish.

I would be remiss not to emphasize how vital it is for MSA to strengthen our providing full support to keeping First Cast, MSA alive. That now includes refreshing equipment supplies, and of truly critical importance is MSA concentrating on enhancing accurate guidance onto our website by providing broader inclusion of detailed guidance concerning realistic information on the location of all known public pools. Repeatedly, we have discussed at First Cast how crucial it is for the public-at-large to readily receive accurate informed information on how to easily locate public pools. That includes driving instructions, where to park, plus anything to know about pool boundaries or advice. The Atlantic Salmon Museum craves for us to collaborate with them to provide valid hand-outs to museum visitors, who often request where they can find public pools within the Miramichi system. We enable the spirit of First Cast to spark any given day by providing the public handy, accurate, and really needed expansive info on public pools. Our strongly developed partnership between ASM & MSA makes this goal readily achievable.

In closing, it has been my honor to have been allowed to found and to continue to monitor First Cast, MSA. I am forever grateful to have received such ready assistance from MSA volunteers, MSA staff, and, especially, from the full-bore collaboration of the Atlantic Salmon Museum. I am confident that new MSA volunteers will commit their efforts to see to it that the baton is successfully passed on for future generations to receive the benefits of First Cast, MSA.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Valeri, First Cast Moderator
Bridgewater, Connecticut & Gray Rapids