

## PASS IT ON

We all know the contributions Ray Scott and Forrest L. Wood have made on our sport, but there are other unsung heroes of the bass fishing world who have helped shape our beloved pastime from the grass roots level. Just about every local bass club around the world has one on their roster. I'm speaking about the seasoned fisherman who helped found the club and has seen it through thick and thin. The guys who teach us more than just where to find fish, they teach life lessons as well. For my club, the Smithville Bassmasters, that someone is Bernie Gram.

At 86, Bernie is still a very active member and a die-hard competitor – still fishing over 25 tournaments a year. Just ask him and he'll tell you he lives for the competition. Bernie has fished for most of his life, but he didn't start tournament fishing until 1988 at the tender age of 61. I should say he was tricked into tournament fishing.

"I didn't have any interest in fishing tournaments," he recalls, "but my buddy said one day as we were heading up the lake, 'Well, I put the money in, so just wanted you to know we're fishing the tournament.' We finished third, and I've been hooked ever since."

One of the founding members of the Smithville Bassmasters, Bernie has seen the club through its hay days when the roster showed over 150 members and the hard times when it listed just a few. He's weathered storms on the water and catastrophic boat wrecks.

Bernie's fished local tournaments and pro/am circuits from Texas to New York, Sharing the boat and helping to inspire young anglers across the country. Even folks like Mark Zona.

"Believe it or not, he's very quiet on the water. Hardly said a word," remembers Bernie. "One my favorite times on the water, was when my non-boater, Denny Scheafer, landed an 8.85 from the back deck. I don't know who was more excited, me or him!"

Don't let his age fool you. He maybe a little slow getting in and out of the boat, but once he's running that 250 horse Yamaha on his Skeeter boat, Bernie is all business. Put a fishing rod in his hand and it's almost like a fountain of youth.

"I like to fish jerkbaits, Senkos, crankbaits, you know whatever works." By making runs at first place and cashing checks, Bernie is still teaching us a few lessons.

Boater or non-boater, rookie or salty veteran, sometimes fishing isn't about putting fish on the scales. Sometimes it's about the friendships you make on the trail and the knowledge you pass along to those in your bass club. Take a look around your club or trail, who inspires you? Who do you inspire? Our sport wouldn't be as popular or as fun without folks like you or the "Bernie" in your club.