

Fishing for Scholarships



FES CEQ Chair Charles C. “Charlie” Isiminger, PE (shown second from left holding the winning Kingfish) and crew (and losing snapper, far right).

By Robert F. Rennebaum, PE, LEED AP, Simmons & White Inc.

On May 16, 2009 Simmons & White, Inc. held our 11th Annual Kingfish - Dolphin - Wahoo (KDW) Fishing Tournament and Fish Fry. This was the seventh year that the firm’s fishing tournament was formatted as a fundraiser for the FES Palm Beach Chapter’s scholarship fund. Thanks to the generosity of tournament sponsors, we were able to present a check for close to \$9,000 in awarding scholarships to area high school and college students pursuing degrees in engineering.

Our first tournament was held in 1999 as an excuse for the partners of the firm to fish against each other (and against a few competitive-minded clients and contractors) on a Saturday morning in May, and then return to my dock in the afternoon to clean and fry the fish caught. We all pitched in \$25 per boat in a “winner take all” format. Ten boats fished the first year and a 26-lb Kingfish took home the prize. Everyone pitched in to clean and fry the fish, enjoy a great picnic and blow the froth off of a few cold beverages, while the children swam in the pool and caught Grunts and Snapper off the dock.

There have been quite a few stories and tall tales told about the tournament over the past 11 years, and even more lessons that have been learned. Word got out very quickly of our family-friendly, social event (without the pressures and intimidations of typical big money tournaments). In very short order the guest list expanded exponentially from the

staff of Simmons & White, Inc. and a few clients who we knew were avid sport fishermen to land use attorneys, planners, architects and a number of other engineers from competing firms. I am not sure what words best describe the emotions the partners of Simmons & White felt when the perpetual trophy hung for a year in the lobby of Kimley-Horn & Associates, Inc. (great job by Kevin Schanen, Jason Lee and their crew on Double Time for winning with a 40-pound Kingfish). We did not feel quite so bad when our Palm Beach Chapter State Director, Larry Smith, PE, won the fifth tournament with an amazing 44.5 pound Bull Dolphin—still the biggest fish ever caught in the history of the event.

Simmons & White has always been strong supporters of both the state and local chapter of the Society. We incentivize active participation by our many young engineers in the organization and promote a culture of giving back to the profession. After the first 4 years of steadily increasing in size



Ray White, Founding Partner of Simmons & White, Inc., Dana Gillette, PE, Scholarship committee Chair, Robert Rennebaum, PE, Tad Rowe, PE and Greg Bolen, PE, Principals, Simmons & White, Inc.

and popularity, we decided to format our tournament to be a fundraiser for the chapter’s scholarship fund. Our chapter has historically distributed less than \$4,000 annually in scholarships, funded mainly from the chapter’s golf tournament. Our goal was to match the chapter’s allocation and allow the scholarship committee to provide a substantial distribution to all the young students who applied. Our fifth tournament in 2003 exceeded our goals and raised \$5,000. The tournament was a true success by every measure and set the standard for the future.

On May 16, 2009 we held our 11th Annual KDW Fishing Tournament & Fish Fry. Since this event was formatted to benefit the scholarship fund we have raised close to \$50,000 for our local chapter to use in awarding scholarships. It is a great honor for us to contribute to the education of our future engineers. Even in the current economy and down-turn that our industry has taken, we still were able to raise close to \$9,000 this year alone. It is the continued support of our sponsors who makes this possible. A total of 38 boats registered for entry in this year’s tournament and over 200 people attended the fish fry and pool party. The overall tournament winner was a 33.5 pound kingfish on the boat “Kalee” by Manny Rodriguez and crew from Concrete Products of the Palm Beaches. “This event is a great time for all and it’s even better that it allows all of us to give something back to our community,” Manny said.



Palm Beach County area students awarded scholarships from money raised in 2008 at Palm Beach County dinner on April 9, 2009. From left: (in front) Yimin chen, Shelly Jin, Brittany Hicks, Bonnie Yip, Laura Fenton, Lea Miller, Laura Hover, (in back) Dana Gillette, Richard Hedlund, Matthew Young, Augustus Cicala III, Mark Vanzwieten and Jim Kunard.

The tournament has become a perfect excuse for the engineering community to come together and enjoy a morning of fishing and an afternoon of socializing and picnicking. Once again a local planner, Kevin McGinley, and his band the Saildogs provided the live music and a local event caterer did all the cooking. The early days of the partners and staff of Simmons & White cleaning and frying the fish that were caught in the tournament are long gone. (That tradition was modified after the third tournament when rough seas limited the catch. We had to run to the local fish market to feed everyone.) Ms. Deanna Rennebaum expressed some concern about all the "smelly" fisherman going in her house to use the bathroom, so now two port-a-johns reside in the driveway on tournament day. All the women, however, are invited to enjoy the inside powder rooms. It goes without saying that Dee receives her fair share of "Thank You's" for allowing such a big event to take place at her home.

In 2008, the tenth annual event raised the most money in the history of the event, totaling \$10,250. This year, the chapter awarded 13 scholarships totaling \$12,000 to local high school and college students who have chosen engineering as their major course of study. We look forward to continuing this great tradition and giving back to the future of engineering in our community. ■

About the Author:



Robert F. Rennebaum, PE, LEED AP has 27 years of civil and traffic engineering experience, with 22 years in West Palm Beach with the firm, Simmons & White, Inc. He serves as the President of the firm. For more information on the tournament, please visit our web site at: www.simmonsandwhite.com.

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